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**SIMON PETER, FISHER OF MEN**



*Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art*

SIMON PETER

A detail from an engraving by Hans Baldung

*HEROES OF GOD SERIES*

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# Simon Peter, Fisher of Men

A fictionalized autobiography  
of the Apostle Peter

by

ALBERT N. WILLIAMS

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*For*  
*my companion on these journeys,*  
*my wife, Ann*



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# 1. THE ADVENTURES ON GALILEE

MY NAME IS SIMON BAR-JONA. In my earlier years, when I lived and traveled among my fellow Jews and the Gentile Syrians of Galilee, there was no need to explain to anyone that "bar-Jona" meant simply "son of Jona" in our beautiful ancient language. But in these last years I have lived only with the Greeks and the Romans, and among those ignorant people it is usually necessary to explain carefully that my name is really Simon and that I am only the son of Jona. How I came by the nickname of Peter, as everyone now calls me, I will unfold in due course.

But, first, let me explain why it is that I am both-ering at all to set down the story of my life.

I am now fifty-four years old. Although my mind and body are still as strong as they were in the days of my youth, and I enjoy perfect health, there are

evil portents in my heart that make me feel that I may hang from a Roman gallows or be strapped to a Roman cross before too many months have passed. Thus I feel it my duty to set down certain matters about my life while time remains. It is not that I feel that an account of my life would be any more instructive to the young or dramatic to the aged than the life stories of other men. It is simply that I was present when certain important events happened, and in order that the eternal record of these matters may be kept straight I feel an obligation to describe them precisely as they took place.

At this particular point in my life I happen to have the time necessary to summon those important events to my mind in their proper order, and to relate them to my beloved friend, John Mark, who has been my constant companion in all my journeys. Not only does John Mark have an unusually quick and ready mind, but he long ago took the pains to learn the art of writing, and now, as he and I and a few other persons are traveling back up to Rome, where we have oft before visited, we have the leisure to undertake this literary task. We are traveling by ship, John Mark and I, and while this calm and pleasant weather holds, we can sit upon the deck in the sun—he to write as I tell him, and I to dream of days long past and of all the amazing sights that I beheld.

With that, John Mark, let us begin.

I was born in the little fishing village of Bethsaida, lying just beside the river Jordan where it empties into the Lake of Gennesaret, or, as some call it, the Sea of Galilee. While I was still a child my father moved to nearby Capernaum, but the two towns lay so close together that I still think of them as one place. The event of my birth, of no great importance to anyone except myself, took place in the thirty-third year of the reign of the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus, which is the formal way that citizens of the Roman Empire date their lives. They count time from the accession of each emperor. Among us, who follow the Risen Christ, we count the years differently. We count back not to the beginning of the intolerable reigns of the Roman emperors, but to the day that Almighty God brought the ancient Jewish prophecies to pass—the day that the Messiah was born to earth. I, Simon bar-Jona, was born in the tenth year of the life of our Lord.

I was not the only son of my father, but was blessed to have a brother, Andrew, to share my childhood years. Andrew was but two years older than I was, and though it has been many painful years since I have seen his handsome and sturdy face, I will never forget the pleasures of our youth together.

Our father was a fisherman, as were so many of

our people who lived on the shores of the great inland sea that played so great a part in our lives. My earliest memories are of sitting on the sandy shore of the Sea of Galilee and watching my father struggle with the baskets of fish that he would hand over the side of his boat to the merchants who came every day to meet the fishing fleets. When I became a little older, I was allowed to help hang the nets up on the drying poles, but it was not until I was ten years old that my father allowed me to go out on the lake with the other fishermen.

I shall never forget that wonderful day. For months I had been looking forward to my tenth birthday, when, my father promised, I would be old enough and strong enough to help handle the huge fish nets. For two years my brother Andrew had been going regularly with the fishing fleet, and my envy for him knew no bounds. And then, it was my turn. I was no longer a child on that fateful day. I was a fisherman.

Unfortunately, my pride in being looked upon as a fisherman was far greater than my strength. Hardly had we hoisted the sails of the boat than my father told me to heave one corner of the net into the water. I had often watched the fishermen do this tricky business, and I felt that I could do it as well as the best of them. Taking a corner of the net in my two hands, I swung my body in a circle, as I had

seen the fishermen do, and with a great heave cast the net over the side of the boat.

With a sudden splash the net hit the water with me still clinging to it like an amazed monkey. The weight of the net had pulled me completely off balance.

I was not frightened at first. Most of the net was still in the boat, and I was half in and half out of the water, tangled in the net like a lamb in a briar bush. But when I looked up to see the fear in my father's face, I suddenly knew in my heart the great terror that all Galileans have for the treachery of the dark body of water that was the source of their livelihood. The cold and swirling water seemed to clutch at my legs like a nest of serpents, and in that instant I gave up all hope of ever seeing dry land again.

Luckily our little boat was drifting slowly, and before I had taken three gasps my father reached his strong arm down into the tangled net and fetched me up by the hair. Placing his feet firmly against the side of the boat, he gave a mighty heave and pitched me clear of the net and into the boat, where I lay shivering and trembling.

"Ah, Simon," he said to me, "in your very first lesson you have learned the greatest danger of all. There are many dangers in our lives. There are the lions in the thickets of the valleys. There are the hiss-

ing serpents that lie in wait for us among the rocks. There are the wolves of evening that beset us when we tend our sheep. But none of them is as treacherous as the waters of Galilee, which can blow up into a fury of waves before a man can ship his oars, and crush his boat like an empty gourd."

And then my father raised his eyes to the heavens and offered a prayer of thanksgiving to the Almighty God for my safe recovery from the ugly depths.

Many a time I had heard my father and other fishermen offer up this prayer when they had returned safely from a stormy trip across the lake. Many a time I had heard it, and I even knew it by heart. But not until that very moment did I understand the full and beautiful meaning of that prayer. And as my father intoned the sacred words, I joined my voice with his:

*They that go down to the sea in ships, that  
do business in great waters;*

*These see the works of the Lord, and his  
wonders in the deep.*

*For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy  
wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof.*

*Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble,  
and he bringeth them out of their dis-  
tresses.*

## 2. THE ARRIVAL OF THE STRANGER

AFTER THAT FIRST and dangerous lesson, I learned very quickly all there was to be learned about the fisherman's trade. Then, on my thirteenth birthday, my father summoned my brother and me to his side.

"My sons," he said, "the Lord has been gracious to me and has given me much profit from my fishing boat. And he has been generous to me by giving me two strong and stalwart sons. Now, according to the ancient custom of our people, Simon has become a man. He has finished his twelfth year of life and has been presented to the elders in the synagogue."

My brother Andrew smiled and put his arm about my shoulders, and my father leaned over and kissed my forehead. It was a proud moment.

"Because of the good fortune that the Lord has granted me," my father continued, "I have saved

enough money to buy another fishing craft. With two boats working these plentiful waters, surely we shall make our fortunes. Then, when the time comes for you to marry, you shall each have a boat of your own."

With that my father led us down the path from our house and out onto the beach. There, next to our own boat, its prow nosing up into the sand, stood another just like it. It was an old boat that had been owned by a friend of my father's who had recently died. My father had bought it from the widow. Old it was and ugly, but to me and Andrew it looked for all the world like the most splendid trireme that ever sailed from Egypt up to Rome. How proud we were that day! And how we lorded it over our two friends, John and James, the sons of my father's friend, Zebedee. And how jealous were John and James when, that very evening, Andrew and I pushed our heavy craft out into the waters and joined the fishing fleet for the first time. Andrew tended the tiller, as was the right of the first-born brother, and I pranced up and down the deck like a Roman senator, seeing to the ragged sail that fluttered in the wind like a tired buzzard. The fact that we lagged many hundreds of paces behind the other boats made no difference. It was our very own boat.



And so the years passed rapidly. There is not much of any account to be set down concerning those happy years, for every day went much the same. As my father had predicted, our fortunes swelled with the passing years, and when, at the age of eighteen, my brother Andrew took himself a wife, there was enough money to buy him a boat of his own. As for the old boat we had come to love, that was now mine alone, and I took my friend John to fish it with me. His brother James, being older, fished with Andrew.

Then it came my turn to marry, and from among the maidens of our town of Capernaum I chose a most beautiful and modest person, Perpetua. My father, by now, had died and been gathered into Abraham's bosom, as we say among our people, and together Andrew and I lived in the house we had inherited, he with his wife, and I with mine and her aged and infirm mother. Those were indeed busy and happy days, and we had little time to care or even to think about the problems of the great world around us.

But soon those simple days were to end, and the troubles of the world were to force themselves upon us. And in this account of my life I come now to the first of those astounding, wondrous events that tore me from my calm and peaceful life in Galilee and

forced me out into the world, and finally up to the capital of the great Empire—Rome.

I was twenty years old when the strange occurrence that I am about to relate took place.

It happened on a Sabbath. There was nothing at first to indicate to any of us that this Sabbath would be at all different from any other. Perhaps I was a little preoccupied and somewhat worried, for my good wife's aged mother had been ill with fever for some days, but when I joined my brother Andrew outside the synagogue, we went inside as usual, completely unsuspecting of the amazing adventure that was to befall us.

Sounding out our voices with a right good will, Andrew and I joined the congregation in reciting the Shema, and then, as old Zebedee, our father's friend, took his place as Deputy of the Congregation, we set about that portion of the service known as the Lifting Up of Hands. How often over the years have I remembered Zebedee's high ringing voice as he called out the prayers, to which all of us in the congregation would reply "Amen!" with our hands held high above our heads.

Then there came, as usual, the reading of certain verses from the ancient Law of Moses, and if I did not listen too attentively, it was because I continued to worry over my mother-in-law's troublesome fever.

But when that was done and it was time for the Lessons from the Prophets, I did indeed pay attention. It was at this point that I first set eyes upon Jesus of Nazareth.

In that portion of our worship services that we call the Lessons from the Prophets, it was customary to invite any stranger in our midst to come forward and select a sermon from one of the Prophets, and to read this sermon to us and explain it in his own way. We were fortunate, in Capernaum, that we so often had learned visitors who would read to us and tell us how the rabbis in Jerusalem or in Alexandria or in Persia interpreted those prophetic sermons. As a matter of fact, it was our only way of keeping up with the thinking of our brethren in other parts of the world. Thus it was that I always paid strict attention when it was time for the Lessons. I was as eager as the next man to know the interpretations of the learned rabbis in distant lands.

But on this occasion it was no traveler from far away who came forward to read to us. It was only a simple carpenter from the village of Nazareth, not too many leagues from Capernaum.

I looked at Andrew and Andrew looked at me, and, indeed, fully half the congregation was looking in a puzzle at the other half. All of us were wondering what an unlettered carpenter from the little vil-

lage of Nazareth could bring of any interest to us, who lived in the large and busy city of Capernaum.

But we did not bid this stranger stop. If there was any one thing that could be said about the men of Capernaum, it was that they were friendly and gentle. And we were interested to hear what he might say to us. The poor, ignorant people in the lonely villages sometimes had strange but quite fascinating ideas, and these we had often found refreshing. Once we had gotten over the surprise of seeing this stranger walk forward to the center of the synagogue to preach to us, we listened with keen interest.

I do not remember the precise passage of the Prophets that he read to us. It was from the stately old Book of Jeremiah, and it described in bitter terms the sins of the Jews in those ancient days.

When he finished reading, he laid down the scroll and looked at the congregation for a long, long moment. And then, instead of preaching to us about the meaning of that particular passage, he surprised us all by speaking to us personally of our own sins. Very quietly he said: "Repent your sins! The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

For another long moment he waited in silence as utter and as dead as midnight upon the desert. Then he repeated what he had said, this time in a voice

that rang out like a sword slashing the air: "Repent your sins! The kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

Not a man among us in the synagogue but turned hastily to his neighbor in puzzlement and wonder. For generations, yes, for centuries, we Jews had been waiting and watching for the Year of the Lord, for the coming of the end of all things, for the kingdom of heaven, as some of our learned and mystic men called it. And in a voice that rang with conviction this stranger in our midst, this carpenter from Nazareth, was telling us that the day of the kingdom of heaven was at hand and that the Messiah was soon to arrive.

You of the Gentile world who will read this strange matter that I am recounting will probably not know how terrible and how awesome a thing that was for this man, Jesus, to cry out in the synagogue. For hundreds of years, ever since the time of the great King David, we Jews had been awaiting the arrival of the Messiah to redeem mankind from the ages of pain and of suffering. This was the Lord's promise to Israel, and to the children of Israel, as the ancient prophets had proclaimed. This promise had been given to Abraham, when God said, "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

And that promise of the Lord had been often repeated by the prophets of later days. Isaiah had said: "Unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

In another age Jeremiah had proclaimed: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel!"

And in even a later age the prophet Joel had proclaimed: "I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land."

In every age, in almost every hour, we Jews had prayed for and hoped for the coming of this Prince of Peace whom the Lord had so long promised us. We would call him the Messiah, which meant, in our ancient tongue, one who is anointed with oil, as a king is anointed. This word *Messiah* you Gentiles made into the Greek word *Christos*, but it meant the same person to us—the one we had awaited so impatiently for so many years.

Thus, when Jesus of Nazareth shouted out in the synagogue that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, all of us felt the pangs of fear and wonder in our

heart. Wonder that it could possibly come true in our own lifetimes, and fear that his coming would be to the clashing of arms with the Roman legions.

And a third time, while yet the room was silent, this stranger in our midst called out in his clear and ringing voice: "Repent your sins! The kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

And all of us trembled, I among them as my brother Andrew said later, and I will never forget his very words: "We were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes."

We had all of us heard the scribes, talking like parrots, repeating only what the rabbis had said. But this man Jesus spoke not the words of others, but from the depths of his own heart.

Then, after Jesus had told us for the third time that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, the silence was broken. From the far back of the synagogue there spoke up old crippled Zeudas. For years this miserable old man had shamed us all with his taunts and his hatred of everything that was good, beautiful, and clean. Upon everything that was not crooked and bent and broken as he was, he called down the vilest curses he could imagine in his twisted mind. Truly, he was possessed by a legion of devils, a host of unclean spirits.

None of us was surprised to hear the crackling voice of old Zeudas, for he feared not man, nor beast, nor God. "Let us alone," he called out. "What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us?"

Many another stranger in Capernaum had withered beneath the contemptuous words of Zeudas, and we all knew that if Jesus was only a common impostor, Zeudas would soon send him on his way with his stinging curses. But Jesus looked patiently and calmly deep into the eyes of Zeudas, and then he performed a wonderful act in our very sight.

He knew that Zeudas was not master of his own actions, but was hounded by the devils in his bent and twisted body. Instead of rebuking Zeudas for his harsh and evil words, Jesus spoke out and rebuked the very spirits themselves. "Hold thy peace," he commanded, "and come out of him."

Dead stillness followed this command that Jesus gave. Not a man among us even breathed, so charged was the moment with tension. And while he waited, Jesus stared steadily at Zeudas. Slowly, like a heavy basket let down from a pinnacle, Zeudas' head slumped, and in a moment he fell to the floor like one dead. But he was not dead. He was only in a deep faint, for we could see his hands clutching at the air like a man seeking to hoist himself up the



side of a wall. As he lay there writhing, an anguished cry burst from his lips, after which he lay still.

In that instant the unclean spirits, whatever they were, left his body, and a moment later Zeudas opened his eyes.

I looked, and clutched at my robe in amazement. For years there had been nothing but the flame of evil in old Zeudas' eyes. Now, for the first time since I could remember, there was peace.

And Zeudas smiled.

There was not a word spoken. Gathering the hem of his robe in his arm lest it catch upon the lintel of the door, Jesus walked calmly amongst us, and out of the synagogue. The service was over.

So suddenly did he leave us that not even Zebedee, the Deputy of the Congregation, remembered to pronounce the benediction—the Priests' Blessing.

All that old Zebedee could say as he looked after the departing Jesus was: "What thing is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him."

### 3. THE MIRACLE AT CAPERNAUM

NOW THAT I LOOK BACK upon that particular Sabbath, I realize how Almighty God played a wonderful part in the events that happened immediately after the service.

As I said, this Jesus of Nazareth strode out of the meeting, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and all of the congregation simply stared after him. Not a man moved.

But I was standing near the door, and I happened to notice that our visitor did not continue his swift march after he left the building. Instead, he acted like any stranger up from the little hillside town of Nazareth to a large city like Capernaum. He stopped and looked about him to get his bearings.

Of course I wanted to speak with him! At that moment I had no idea about him, whatsoever. I

didn't know whether he was a trained teacher, a member of that terrible crew of military Zealots who have so plagued our country, or merely another skilled worker of medical wonders, like the pagan Greek priests who had studied in the Greek Temple to Asclepius, the god whom they worship for good health and for healing.

All that I did know was that I had seen tremendous depths of kindness, mercy, and knowledge in his flashing brown eyes, and that I was somehow drawn toward him. I wanted to talk to him and to know him better.

I did what any hospitable person would have done. While the rest of the congregation puzzled and wondered over the sudden cure of Zeudas, who by this time was sitting up and weeping for sheer joy, I hastened outside.

I went directly up to this Jesus of Nazareth. I called him rabbi. Many of you Greeks and Romans who will read this do not understand that the word rabbi does not mean priest or elder of the congregation, but only teacher. "Rabbi," I said, afraid to reach out my hands to touch him, but trying to indicate in my smile that I did welcome him to Capernaum, "would you do me the very great honor of breaking bread with me and my family in my home?"

He had not seen me approach. He was looking out

over the beautiful Sea of Galilee that lay at the foot of the street. But when I spoke, he turned to me with a warm smile.

"I know you are a stranger in Capernaum," I continued. "I see you are carrying a loaf and a fish for your food, but would you not care to join us in our humble meal and rest the fatigue of your journey from your legs?"

He paused to look at me, to see if I were a worthy person, perhaps. "I would like that very much. What is your name?"

I told him what my name was and that I earned my living at the fishing trade. As a matter of fact, now that I look back upon the matter, I recall that I continued to talk about myself all the way to my house, which lay a good thousand paces from the synagogue. He was that sort of person. Quiet, gentle, and unassuming—asking me about myself instead of telling me about himself. And all this while it was he whom I had wanted to learn to know.

When we arrived at my house my visitor immediately made himself friendly and genial. Within a few minutes my brother Andrew arrived, and with him our friends, James and John. But in the house there was not much time for us to talk. As much as we all wanted to ask questions and hear him explain the amazing words he had preached in the synagogue,

there was no chance. There was wood to be laid on the hearth; there was water to be poured from the great cask; there was the food that had been prepared the day before to be set out. And there was my wife's sick and aged mother to be cared for as she lay on her couch in fever and pain.

There was simply too much for us to do for any serious talk.

At last all the preparations were done, and we were ready to break bread. Drawing our benches up to the table, we were preparing to take our seats, when my good wife's mother recovered her strength so far as to protest her very weakness.

"O stranger," she called out, lifting her poor bony fingers from the pallet, "I should rise and serve you. You are our guest. But this fever wracks me as if my very bones were on fire."

And Jesus, who was about to take his seat at our table, turned back to her and said: "Ah, little mother, you can be well and cured of the fever."

As he spoke, he crossed the room toward her, walking gently and slowly. He had not asked her if she wanted to be cured of her fever, mind you. He had only told her that she could be cured.

"I can . . . be cured?" she questioned in amazement.

"Yes," he said, even more quietly than before.

## FAREWELL TO CAPERNAUM

for the coming of the kingdom of heaven, which was so near at hand.

Of course, in those days, none of us understood anywhere near as much about these matters as we did later. We were only students and disciples ourselves. But on our journeyings, when we were alone with Jesus, we had many chances to talk quietly with him and to learn the great lessons that he was teaching. And Jesus was eager that we should learn these lessons deeply and thoroughly, for he told us that it was in his mind that we should be his apprentices, and that, when we had learned the great gospel that he was preaching, we should go out on our separate ways to teach and to preach the coming of the kingdom of heaven, just as he was preaching it.

I think perhaps the first true realization of the importance of our mission came some weeks after we had left Capernaum, when he preached to a great multitude high on a mountain far above the distant waters of our beautiful lake.

We had come to a spot just outside one of the largest towns of all, where a great hill rose majestically above the whole countryside. Here he turned off the road and made his way to a large open spot several hundred paces away from the road.

He let it be known that he would preach there that day, and within the hour a great crowd of peo-

It was the first step she had taken in seven days, and she needed not the slightest crutch to lean upon. Even as we watched, the fever broke away and left her, and she was as strong as ever she had been. Within a matter of minutes she was chatting away like a pigeon and seeing to our supper. And in the friendliest manner Jesus chatted with her about the taste of the food, about the troubles of caring for a house, about the condition of the weather, and about every other matter under the sun that a guest and hostess commonly talk about.

But as for me, and as for Andrew, James, and John, I am afraid we were all silent as we ate. There was too much on our minds for simple conversation. That day we had seen wonders that had never been seen before in Capernaum.

The little mother perhaps may not have understood, but we understood. We knew that this man Jesus was a holy man come among us, no less than any prophet of ancient days.

And I think she must have known that, too, although she had never been trained in the writings of the ancients and the knowledge of the Prophets. Later that day, when Jesus had left our house, I asked her: "What did he say to you when he cured you of the fever?"

"He said nothing to me," she replied. "He spoke to the fever."

"But how did you know that you would be cured?" I pressed on.

She paused and smiled gently at me. "I looked into his eyes," she answered, "and I saw the power of God shining in them."



## 4. THE LAST VOYAGE OF THE FISHING FLEET

AFTER SUNDOWN THAT DAY, when the Sabbath was finished, Andrew, James, John, and I packed our suppers and made our way to the beach to set about our night of fishing. We did not leave our visitor, of course. The simple rules of hospitality would have forbidden that. It was simply that he was busy and did not even miss us when we left.

Did I say that he was busy? He was thronged. Scarcely had we finished our supper than a steady stream of people began to arrive to look upon the man who Zeudas said had cured him of his plaguing devils. So swiftly did the word of the wonder at that Sabbath service make its way around curious Capernaum, that within the hour after our meal was done the room was so packed with people that our visitor took himself out into the square before my fig orchard, the better to have room to speak.

And thus it was that he scarcely missed us, I am sure, when we made our way down to the shore to get about our fishing.

As we gathered our nets together and made ready for the water, we talked among ourselves as usual. There were perhaps two dozen of us working on our various boats, and back and forth we passed, coiling ropes, stretching nets, and generally getting in each other's way, which, if nothing else, made it easy to keep the conversation going.

And the only subject of conversation was Jesus of Nazareth.

"He is preaching what John the Baptist preached," said one old fellow, who no longer went out fishing with us, but who came down to the beach to help us with our nets. "Repent your sins! The kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

"Indeed he does," said another, "and look where John the Baptist is now. In Herod Antipas' prison."

And it was true. All of us knew of John the Baptist, and how he, too, had preached that the Day of the Lord was near. And we had lately heard the news that he had been locked in the desolate prison at the fortress Machaerus, where Herod Antipas kept his most dangerous prisoners.

But all of this talk meant only one thing to me—if so many holy men and prophets of our day claimed

that the Messiah was about to come to earth, it must be true. And I made that very remark.

"Ha, listen to Simon bar-Jona," was the snort I got from our friend, the tender of the nets. "Now he thinks that this Jesus of Nazareth is a prophet."

"The rabbis tell us that Elijah the Tishbite still hovers over the earth, ready to return to herald the coming of the Messiah," I shot back hotly. I knew as much of the lore of the rabbis as any of the men in Capernaum, and I meant to make myself heard.

"So if we grant that Elijah the Tishbite might someday return, what makes you think this Jesus is he?" taunted another.

"He has worked wonders," I answered. "It is told in the chronicles of our kings that Elijah the Tishbite wondrously replenished the jug of oil and the jar of meal from which he ate when he lived in the house of the widow of Zarephath. No less a wonder did this Jesus of Nazareth do this very day in my house."

Now none of these men had been present when my wife's mother was cured. But in a city no larger than Capernaum news travels rapidly, and they had all heard about it.

"He may be a holy man," protested the ancient gaffer who mended nets, "but he certainly is not Elijah the Tishbite come back to earth."

"How do you know?" asked the great hulking Zachary, who sometimes did not even bother with sails on his boat, for he was so strong that he could row as fast as many of us could sail. Zachary loved to keep any argument moving. "How do you know he's not Elijah?"

"Because Elijah the Tishbite rose into the skies in a whirlwind and a chariot of fire, and he will return in a chariot of fire. Now tell me, who saw any chariot of fire when this Jesus of Nazareth descended into Capernaum?" The old net-mender slapped his thigh with his calloused hands, so proud he was of having made a splendid point in an argument. He thought that he had won the argument completely.

Then old Zebedee spoke up. Zebedee had kept silent so far, but he could not contain his wisdom any longer. "Last week I journeyed down to Cana," he said. "I went by way of Hukkok, but I returned by Chinnereth."

This was the way the rabbis and the wise men argued when they debated great matters on the porch of the synagogue. What Zebedee meant was simply this—that just because Elijah had gone up to heaven in a chariot of fire did not mean that he would have to return to earth in that same chariot. It was a neat point that Zebedee made, and there was much nodding of heads and satisfied chuckling. And it proved

the point that I had tried to make—that not a man among us could argue for certain that Jesus of Nazareth was *not* Elijah the Tishbite returned to earth to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah.

When the argument about Elijah the Tishbite was done and there was no more talk, we pushed out into the fishing waters, Andrew and I together in the same boat, as we sometimes did. The boats of the fishing fleet were spread out near the hither shore of the lake for a distance of several thousand paces, scarcely moving, for there was hardly any wind that night. From hour to hour one of the boats would drift close to another, and in the darkness we could hear the fishermen calling to each other to mind the nets, lest the tillers get tangled. We could hear the splashing of oars and the creak of tillers as the drifting boats pulled clear of each other, and then there would be silence for another long hour.

Time and time and time again Andrew and I heaved our net into the lake, but every time it came back as empty as if it had been drying on the beach at Capernaum. There was not a fish to be had. If there had been any wind at all, we would have made for the opposite shore, but there was not so much as a breath as the night grew longer. Short of pulling the bulky craft with the cumbersome oars, we were doomed to passing the lonely night in this same

spot—a spot that the very fish seemed to have cursed and left.

As the night passed, Andrew and I talked in the low tones that fishermen use. There was really no need to talk in such quiet voices, but it is a fisherman's habit, as if the darkness of the night had ears to hear our secrets.

And, of course, we talked about the strange event that had happened that day.

"Do you really believe that Jesus of Nazareth is Elijah returned to earth?" Andrew asked me.

With the crowd of loud-voiced men on the beach it was better to be loud than to be certain. To them I had protested: "Yes!" But to Andrew I could only say: "I do not know."

"But he is surely a holy man," Andrew insisted.

"Yes," I replied. "He is certainly a holy man."

"But how can we be sure?" Andrew kept asking. "It might now be the time that God has chosen to restore Israel, and this man might be his prophet, come to warn us of the arrival of the Messiah."

That was what I was thinking. The greatest promise of all was that God would one day restore Israel to her former greatness, to rule all the world from Jerusalem. How were we to know when that time was? I could not tell.

"But he has no followers," Andrew pointed out.

And that was strange, for it was the custom among our people from the ancient days for every prophet to gather disciples about him, to carry his message to every corner of the land.

"No," I admitted, "he has no followers. But that still does not mean that he is not a prophet of God."

After that Andrew was silent for a long time, and then, finally, he said: "Simon, could it be that this Jesus has just begun his ministry as a prophet, and that his purpose in coming to Capernaum was to enlist disciples and followers?"

I thought about that for a long while. I had never before that day heard of Jesus of Nazareth, and yet the news of prophets and holy men traveled among us Jews like fire in a dry field. Yes, I began to think, perhaps Andrew is right. Perhaps Jesus of Nazareth was only that day setting out upon his prophetic ministry, and perhaps one of the reasons that he had come to Capernaum was to find disciples.

Then, as I thought this over, Andrew asked me another question: "Simon, what if Jesus should ask you to go with him and become his disciple; what would you do?"

I had to chuckle at that, and I am afraid that I startled my good brother. "Me, a disciple of a prophet?" I asked. "Who am I to be a holy man's disciple? I do not wear goatskin garments. I have

not been brought up to live on locusts and wild berries. I am a married man with a fishing boat that must be in the waters every night, or my wife and such family as I hope to have will starve."

No, I could never think of myself as a holy man's disciple, walking barefoot over the highroads and byroads trying to make men more righteous. Not me. I was not a heroic person. I was only Simon, the son of Jona, a fisherman on Galilee.

At last, as the sun rose over the eastern hills, Andrew and I packed our net away, and because there was still no wind, we hefted our heavy oars and began to make our weary way to shore.

As we rounded the little pinnacle of rocks that sheltered the beaches of Capernaum, we saw a crowd of people along the way. Standing up in the boat, Andrew peered ahead, and then reported: "It is Jesus. He is preaching on the beach."

And, as our boat coasted into the strand, I could see a crowd—perhaps a hundred people—pushing to get near Jesus, who must have been walking on the shore at daybreak for the peacefulness of the hour. It was a habit I had myself—to walk alone in that most quiet of all hours.

But the people would not let him alone. The fish merchants coming down to meet the boats had probably seen him, and within minutes a crowd of them



had gathered to hear him preach and to ask him to do wonders for them.

But as we drew near to the beach in our boat, we could tell that he was not preaching. The multitude of people were too eager to touch his hands, to touch the hem of his robe, to ask him questions. He could not make himself heard.

Then he chanced to look behind him and see us in our boat, now not ten paces away. "Simon," he called. "Thrust me out a little from the land, that I may quiet these people."

With that he lifted the hem of his robe and in his bare feet stepped through the ripples of waves near the shore, and into our boat. Quickly, before any of the crowd could follow him, I thrust my shoulder against the oar, and poled us out a few paces to the deep water.

And there, while we drifted ever so slowly, he spoke out to the crowd from my boat.

As he had in the synagogue, he told them again on this thrilling morning: "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

Again and again he called upon them to repent, listing the evils of mankind for which we would all be called to account when that near day should come. It was one of the most magnificent moments of my life, to be sitting no more than an arm's length

from this wonderful prophet, hearing him tell the Lord's promise to bring the kingdom of heaven to mankind. There was no longer any question in my mind as I heard him speak. He might not be Elijah returned to earth, I knew, but he was surely as great and as holy as Elijah the ancient Tishbite had been.

Gradually, as he spoke, the sun rose higher overhead, and the multitude began to drift away. Other fishing boats had come in to shore, some of them with better luck than ours, and the fish merchants left the beach where we were drifting, and got on to their labors.

Finally, we were alone—the three of us.

And then, for the first time Jesus chanced to look about our boat, and saw that it was empty and that other fishing boats had a full cargo of silverlings. "Let down your nets for a draught," he told me.

"Master," I said, "we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net."

I wanted to show him that his kindheartedness was all for nothing and that not a single fish swam that night in this corner of the great lake. Nonetheless Andrew and I heaved our net overside.

Scarcely had the ropes of the net slipped under the water than it felt as if every fish in the lake had swum into our seine. Even with Jesus helping us,

Andrew and I could not pull in the net, so full of fish was it. But coming near alongside us was another boat, and when the fishermen in that boat saw our plight, they rowed swiftly over to help us.

But with the five of us bending our backs to the net, it broke, it was so full of fish. Even so, even with our broken net and with theirs, we scooped up load after load of fish from that very spot until our two boats were floating at the very water's edge. It took all the strength that Andrew and I could muster to inch our way to the shore.

Then I knew! This was no mere wonder that Jesus had worked. Those fish in our net were a sign from God to Andrew and me that many wondrous things were to befall us in the company of Jesus.

But I was afraid. Never in my life before had I been in the company of a holy man. Of course I was as pious as the next man, and went every Sabbath to the synagogue, and gave alms to all who asked, but I knew that in my heart a hundred sins clashed against the wall of the Law of Moses—the wall that was meant to keep men righteous.

I staggered out of my boat onto the beach and fell to my knees at his feet. Clutching the hem of his robe, I cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man."

But he would not listen to me. He put his hands

on my shoulders and looked at me with his deep and peaceful eyes. And then he said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

I looked at Andrew and Andrew looked at me in wonder. For all that I was unworthy, for all that I had no humility and grace, for all that I had never done to obey the Law of Moses, still, this wonderful prophet wanted me in his company.

We could not have refused to go with him any more than the moon could refuse to set or the sun to rise. Jesus of Nazareth—whoever he was—wanted us for disciples.

We left our boat with friends to care for, and went with him.

## 5. FAREWELL TO CAPERNAUM

I DID NOT REALIZE, when I agreed to go with Jesus of Nazareth and be his disciple, that I was entering a whole new life. Neither did my brother Andrew, and, later that day, neither did John and James, who also agreed to join us. We simply thought that we would spend part of our time with this wonderful teacher, going about the towns and villages near Capernaum and helping him in his work. We had no idea that the road we took that day would lead us down to Jerusalem and finally up to Rome, and that for many of us it would lead to a martyr's grave.

For the first few weeks of this wonderful new life we scarcely noticed how time was passing. We journeyed slowly, going from town to town, and sometimes spending two or three days in one place. Usually some good people in the towns we visited gave

us food and lodging, for Jesus was soon renowned throughout Galilee.

Naturally the four of us basked in the fame of this great teacher. As his disciples we were given high honor and much admiration wherever we went. Often we would stand at the back of the crowds that attended him, and before long we would find ourselves the center of smaller crowds. I can tell you that it gave me a very great thrill to have some wealthy merchant come up to me—a mere fisherman—and say: “Tell me, rabbi, what is the secret of your master’s powers?”

But you must not imagine that our journeyings with Jesus of Nazareth were all pleasure and a life of ease. There was much work to be done wherever we went. The crowds were always large, and they kept growing larger, and it fell upon us to see that the old and the lame and the blind managed to find places to sit close by his feet. Often, after a long day of preaching to a great multitude, Jesus would leave us and go by himself to pray and to rest. Part of our duty then was to keep the multitudes from following him, and that meant that we would have to keep the crowd occupied by talking with them and explaining the parables that Jesus had told and what it was that Jesus meant when he called upon men and women to repent their sins in order to be ready

for the coming of the kingdom of heaven, which was so near at hand.

Of course, in those days, none of us understood anywhere near as much about these matters as we did later. We were only students and disciples ourselves. But on our journeyings, when we were alone with Jesus, we had many chances to talk quietly with him and to learn the great lessons that he was teaching. And Jesus was eager that we should learn these lessons deeply and thoroughly, for he told us that it was in his mind that we should be his apprentices, and that, when we had learned the great gospel that he was preaching, we should go out on our separate ways to teach and to preach the coming of the kingdom of heaven, just as he was preaching it.

I think perhaps the first true realization of the importance of our mission came some weeks after we had left Capernaum, when he preached to a great multitude high on a mountain far above the distant waters of our beautiful lake.

We had come to a spot just outside one of the largest towns of all, where a great hill rose majestically above the whole countryside. Here he turned off the road and made his way to a large open spot several hundred paces away from the road.

He let it be known that he would preach there that day, and within the hour a great crowd of peo-

ple began to arrive. His fame was so great, by now, that it needed but the slightest rumor that he was to preach to empty any town or village within walking distance.

As he waited for the multitude to gather, we all knew that this was the day he would unveil the deep secret of his message to us. He did not, as usual, walk among the crowds healing the sick and comforting the suffering, as he preached. Instead, he stayed apart, by himself, until he felt the time ready, and then he stood up above them on a bit of a hummock, and preached in a new and a different fashion.

This time he did not bother with the command to repent, for the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Instead, he opened an entirely new matter to our ears. It was a long sermon, and it has been copied down in many forms, and is well known to Christian, Jew, and pagan, and so I will not relate it in all its detail. I will only describe briefly the effect that it had on those of us who were his disciples and who were learning from him that we might take his message out into the world.

In my own memory I have always called it the Sermon That Was Made upon the Mount, and I will set that title to it in this account.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit," he stated, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."



"Blessed are they that mourn," he said next, "for they shall be comforted."

And so on as it has so often been written down.

Now you must remember that this was the very first time that any of us had been told exactly what was to be promised to us when the kingdom of heaven would come to pass. For months Jesus had warned us, and John the Baptist before him had warned, that the kingdom was at hand. But here, on this occasion, he told us exactly what the promise of the kingdom was! Those that mourned for their sins, they were to be comforted by God! Those that were oppressed, and were poor and afflicted in spirit, they would see the kingdom of heaven as a reward for their suffering! The humble and meek would enjoy the establishment of the land that had so long been promised them by the Prophets! The righteous would see God!

And above all, Jesus satisfied our concern for the ancient Law of Moses. Later on in his sermon he told us, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill!"

That was important, for during the past weeks there had been many who had accused us and him of putting aside the law. On one occasion in particular we had been journeying from one town to an-

other, and found ourselves halfway between the two towns on the Sabbath. To satisfy our hunger, we had gone into a field of corn and filled our bellies with the fresh new fruit of the kernels.

And certain of the Pharisees, those sturdy and righteous students of the Law of Moses, had complained bitterly to Jesus, "Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath day."

But Jesus had told them: "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath," which meant simply that the laws of Moses were established to help men obtain greater righteousness, not simply to keep men bound in foolish chains.

Now we understood even more deeply—mercy, kindness, inner righteousness, a high moral life, that was obedience to the spirit of the Law of Moses that surpassed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees themselves. The Law itself, Jesus was telling us on this famous day, was not the ladder to the kingdom of heaven. The way to the kingdom was the righteousness inside a man's heart that the Law protected. That was the Way; that was the Word of God!

Now all of us were prepared to greet the Messiah when he arrived, and to open the way to the kingdom of heaven to mankind. Truly I then knew that Jesus could be no less a person than a latter day

Elijah, appointed by God to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah!

And the multitude, too, knew this. When Jesus finished this amazing declaration, this beautiful and thrilling sermon, we disciples walked among them. On every hand we heard them exclaim, "We are astonished at his doctrine."

Now, in my heart I was ready for the coming of the Messiah. Because of all that Jesus had taught me, I knew that I would recognize him when he came, and I knew that I would be ready to enter the kingdom of heaven, and help rule the world of the Gentiles from the Holy City of Jerusalem.

## 6. THE REVELATION ON MOUNT HERMON

JOHN MARK COMPLAINS that the words bubble forth from my lips in such profusion that he cannot match his writing to their speed.

And surely it is true. As I remember those wonderful and thrilling days, so many incidents crowd into my memory that I feel that I must speak rapidly to push them all into the little time at our disposal.

I have moved ahead so fast in my story, for example, that I have neglected to tell that we were no longer only four disciples, but twelve. It is not important to know how each one came into the company of Jesus. Like the first four of us, they were simply men whom Jesus met upon our travels and whom he wanted for disciples. As we had done, they laid down the work they had been doing, and joined us without a backward glance. Like us, they gave up

wives, families, and homes, and like us, I am sure that none of them understood that the road they were walking had no turning back, but went only forward to that most bitter ending on Golgotha.

However, I must list those other eight lest readers accuse me of forgetting that they, too, were important in our company.

The first who joined us was Levi, a taxgatherer in the service of the Tetrarch of Galilee, Herod Antipas. Perhaps you Greek and Roman readers of this tale do not understand the hatred which we Jews held for those of our people who worked at gathering the Roman taxes. Because we hated them so much, they stayed by themselves, not daring to join with their brethren in any activity, often not even daring to enter the synagogue lest they be hissed and spat upon.

Thus it was with double joy that we embraced Levi, a taxgatherer, when he came forward in one town we visited, and after hearing Jesus preach, exclaimed: "Master, forgive all the wickedness I have ever done. In this hour I turn my back upon the business of gathering taxes, and will journey with thee to the ends of the earth, if only thou will accept a wicked man into thy holy company."

As he looked at lepers and sick people, Jesus looked at Levi with great love in his eyes. "Come

with me," he said, extending his hand to the publican.

That was how Levi joined us. To seal the bargain of Levi's repentance, Jesus called him not by the name his father had given him, but by a new name, Matthew, which meant, in our ancient tongue, Gift of God.

And I remember how some of the Pharisees rebuked Jesus for taking a sinner and a taxgatherer into his company. To them Jesus replied: "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

After Matthew joined us, we soon found seven more good and righteous men who could be trusted in our company, and who were eager to learn the great message that Jesus preached. They came not from one place, but they joined us one by one in the different towns we visited. They were—Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, another named James, Thaddeus, another named Simon, and one named Judas.

Now after the day that Jesus preached the Sermon That Was Made on the Mount, as I call it, events began to move with great speed for all of us. Every day his fame as a prophet and as a holy man grew greater. And every day the danger from the Pharisees grew more serious. I must point out for the sake of history that not all the Pharisees were our ene-

mies. Indeed, many a fine and studious Pharisee listened to Jesus when he preached, and vowed repentance of his own sins. No, the danger was from certain few Pharisees who thought that Jesus was seeking to destroy the great Law of Moses. Jesus had said as plainly as he could that the Law should not be destroyed, but should stand in every jot and tittle of it until the kingdom of heaven had arrived, but still there were some who wanted Jesus put away so that he could no longer preach his new and beautiful gospel.

But even more dangerous than the anger of these certain Pharisees was the wrath of Herod Antipas. I must explain that Herod Antipas had no case against Jesus of Nazareth as a person. It was only that Herod's duty was to keep peace in the Tetrarchies of Galilee and Perea. When his courtiers told him that men and women by the hundreds and thousands were leaving their homes to follow after Jesus, he was afraid that Jesus would inspire them to riot and make war against the hated Romans who ruled us.

It was indeed an hour that demanded great courage, and it was for a time like this that Jesus had trained us. Now, with the danger increasing on every hand, Jesus took the twelve of us apart one day and commanded us to go out into the towns and villages

by ourselves and preach his message in his name. In God's name he gave each of us the power to heal the sick, to cleanse the lepers, and to heal all manner of sickness and disease.

But he warned us: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake."

With that warning, we went out on our own first preaching tours.

Two by two we went in every direction through Galilee.

John and I chose to be companions, and a busier, more exciting and inspiring ten days of my life I have never lived.

In every town and village all we had to do was announce that we were disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, and before we could unloose the sash from our cloaks, a crowd would have gathered, begging us to preach the message that had grown so famous—that the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

Everywhere we went we had the same question put to us: "Who is this master of yours? Who is this Jesus of Nazareth?"



"He calls himself the Son of man," was our reply. "He is truly a servant of the Lord."

"But is he Elijah returned to earth to punish the wicked?" some would ask. And others: "Is he Jeremiah, come back from the grave?"

And yet others: "Is he another Ezra, walking among the people?"

These questions we did not answer. In truth, we could not answer, for we did not know. All that I could answer was that he might be any of the ancient prophets returned to herald the coming of the Messiah. But as to which one of them he was, he had never told us, and we did not know.

Finally, after ten amazing days and nights, we returned to the spot where we had agreed to meet, Capernaum. Great was my joy to visit my beloved wife a few hours, and to tell her of the wondrous things that had befallen me. She had already heard how John and I had healed the sick and cleansed lepers in the name of God, and as I told her of these things, she wondered.

"How . . . how can these things be, Simon?" she asked me, with a great puzzle in her voice.

I wanted to tell her how such things could be done, but there were no words to describe the strange and mysterious powers that all twelve of us had been given.

"But how, Simon?" she insisted. "Jesus must have given you some dark and mystic words to say."

But he had not. He had only told us to do these wonders in his name, and to have faith in the healing power of God.

Faith! That was the answer, and I had never known exactly what it was until Perpetua pressed me for an answer. It was simply the great faith that we all had in God—faith that anything done in his name was possible.

And then—that very night—there took place a test of my own faith so strange and terrifying that even now my heart beats faint when I think back upon it. When it happened I did not know that it was a test of the power of that faith. But now, these many years later, it is all plain and clear to me. I had told Perpetua that all the wonders I had done had come about through faith, and yet, I found out, I had but little faith myself.

It came about like this.

All that day, and far after the sun had lowered, a great multitude had beset us in Capernaum, listening to Jesus, and begging that he do wonders and heal them of their illnesses. At last, when the shades of night had risen and the crowds had left, Jesus called us to him and told us to fetch a large boat and sail around the farther end of the lake, while he

walked. He wanted the peace of night to be alone with his thoughts and prayers. He would meet us on the other side.

With that he took himself off in the darkness.

It was very late when we left Capernaum, well past the middle of the night. Slowly we rowed toward the opposite shore, and it was not until we were more than halfway across that we realized how slowly we had been making headway with our crowded boat. And then the early morning wind came up, blowing against us.

Harder and harder we rowed, and more and more slowly we went. Finally it was very near the sunrise, and although we could see the headlands of the opposite shore in the mist, it seemed impossible to make that last half mile to reach the beach where Jesus had said he would meet us.

Now, as I peered out into the mist, I perceived the figure of a man walking. At first he seemed to be standing on the beach waiting for us, and I was sure it was Jesus. Then, as I watched, the white-robed figure seemed to be walking out on the waves toward us. I called to the others, and they, too, saw this figure, and as it walked over the tops of the waves, we became sore afraid that it might be some evil spirit come to harm us.

Scarcely thinking, we cried out in terror as the fig-

ure came nearer to us. I think it was Bartholomew who first wailed out, but he should not be scorned for cowardice, for the rest of us quickly joined voice with him.

But the figure was actually Jesus. When he heard us cry out in fright, he called over to us: "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid."

When I recognized his voice, I stood up in the prow and watched him. Truly he was performing the most marvelous wonder of all. He was actually walking toward us on the surface of the waves. Immediately my heart surged in wonder and in love for him. Every day he was showing us a little more of the great mystery of who he was and what his mission was. This was just another opening of the door to that mystery.

"O master," I cried out, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water!"

Jesus answered me straightway, and I could tell by his voice that he was glad that I had asked to share in the divine personality that hovered over him and enfolded him in its strength. "Come, Simon," he called out to me, and I could see in the mists that he stretched forth his hand to me.

What a surge of exultation there was in my heart as I stepped over the side of the boat, and felt my foot rest firm upon the heaving waves! What a power

flushed through my veins! What soaring wings my soul had!

Two steps . . . three steps . . . across the water Jesus stood, smiling at me, his arms outstretched to guide me. Four steps . . . five . . . and then . . . Even now, when I think about it, my heart feels faint from shame and for fear. Suddenly I looked about me, and remembered. I was only Simon born son of Jona, a simple Galilean fisherman. And below me lay the cruel cold waters of the Sea of Galilee. In the instant I became mortally frightened, and for a moment felt that it was only a terrible dream.

But quickly I knew that it was not a dream, for the minute I knew fear in my heart I sank like a stone into the water and began flailing my arms about me like any miserable animal that had fallen from a bridge. "Lord, save me!" was all I had strength to say before the waters closed over my face.

Instantly Jesus was at my side, and through the cold waters I could feel his hand upon my wrist, and in the midst of a terror so overwhelming that I did not know what was happening, I felt his strong arms lift me back into the boat.

Coughing out the water that had flooded my throat, I felt a drench of salt tears on my face. Burying my head in my arms, I wept when I realized how

my mortal fear had overcome the great faith I had first shown in Jesus.

As I wept, Jesus looked upon my bent back, and said; "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

Indeed, why did I doubt? Was it that I still had no supreme faith in Jesus himself? Did I think that he was only a prophet come to warn of the coming of the Messiah? In that day I did not truly know what it was I thought, or what extent my faith should have.

That final lesson was to come a few days later.

The very next day we left Galilee, and went into the north. There was a good reason for this sudden departure. For months, now, Jesus and all of us had been preaching the coming of the kingdom of heaven, which we knew to mean righteousness in men's hearts and a time of peace and goodwill among all men. But many of those who heard Jesus preach missed this great point. They thought that the kingdom of heaven was to be nothing more than a splendid national kingdom in Judea, when the Jews under a military leader would sweep the Roman legions from the face of the earth.

It was to get away from those people that Jesus led us up into the north country for a brief while. He hoped that we could find a quiet spot where we

could rest, and where he could continue his instructions to us.

Into the north we walked, into the country known for generations as Phoenicia, where the Jews were not so numerous, and where the great name of Jesus of Nazareth was not so widely known. Up the Jordan river to its source we walked, and then we turned west to the great sea, which the Romans call *Mare Nostrum*: Our Sea.

Finally, after a week or so by ourselves, Jesus indicated that it was time to return and to get on about our preaching tour. So far we had preached only in Galilee, and now Jesus told us that the time had come to make our way south into Samaria and Judea, and finally to the great Holy City of Jerusalem itself.

On the last night before we reached the borders of Galilee, we stopped a long day's march from Capernaum, just outside the handsome Roman town of Caesarea Philippi. We found a pleasant grove a few paces from the main highroad at the foot of towering Mount Hermon, and there we spread our robes on the ground beside a rushing spring. After lighting a fire for warmth, we sat around the glowing coals for a while to talk—as we usually did with Jesus—and to rest our legs from the day-long walk we had just finished.

Finally our talk drifted away, and we fell silent. We could see that some great matter was on Jesus' mind, and we had learned that when such matters pressed on him our best course was to remain silent, and not seek to question or console him. When he felt the time ripe, he would tell us what it was that he was pondering.

Then, like a lightning bolt from the clouds, there came a sudden question from his lips. "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"

Instantly there was a tenseness among us. We had all asked that question of ourselves and of each other a hundred times, and we had never found the answer to it. Indeed, nobody knew who Jesus was. Everybody kept asking us that question.

Jesus repeated the question, this time more urgently: "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"

There was no use in remaining silent. We all knew that. Jesus had determined to probe to the end of the matter and find the answer for us. Slowly Andrew raised his head and looked at Jesus, and tried an answer: "Some say thou art John the Baptist."

But James, the son of Zebedee, had also heard other things: "Some say thou art Elijah."

That was what most people thought, and, until that moment, if someone had pressed me on pain



of my life to answer, that is what I would have answered.

And then Matthew spoke out: "Some say thou art Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

And then, as Jesus studied our faces, we fell silent again. We could not answer. Slowly his studious and piercing gaze fell upon one of us, and then passed to the next. In his gaze there was the sign of the deepest search. He was searching the answer from us! He was not telling us the answer!

At last he spoke slowly: "But whom say ye that I am?"

Not a one of us could answer. Not a one of us.

Again his gaze passed from face to face of us, as he sought the answer. But none of us could give it.

Finally, he came around to me, and rested his eyes deep into my own. He was studying me searchingly, and suddenly I knew that he was trying to tell me something. Not tell me anything in words, but rather, trying to inflame my soul so that it should know something.

Then—wonder of wonders—an image passed through my mind. I could feel, as in a dream, the cold waters of the Sea of Galilee engulf me, as they had a week before, and his strong hand lift me out of the treacherous deep. And I could hear his voice

again, resounding in my ears: "O thou of little faith. . . ."

A wave of understanding broke over me. The vast powers that he had, the deep wells of tenderness and love, the clear vision that he had into our fears and our hopes! Jesus was not Jeremiah or any of the prophets! He was not Elijah returned to life to herald the coming of the Messiah!

I knew it and my soul knew it. Jesus of Nazareth was the holy Messiah, the Son of God.

I nearly fainted from the force of the knowledge when it entered my heart. Leaning forward, and clambering to my knees, I could no more than whisper: "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."

Instantly it seemed as if a breath of new wind from the outer heavens had entered the grove where we sat. I blinked my eyes, and Jesus was no longer seated before me. He had risen to his feet, and, in the amazing instant, I found that I, too, had risen, and was standing before him. And our beloved friends, they, also, were no longer seated on the ground, but were standing in a circle around us, looking at Jesus with wonder and awe in their eyes.

The blood was pounding through my veins with such terrible force that my ears were like caves filled with rushing winds. For a moment I did not even

realize that Jesus was speaking to me, and then, as I caught the sense of his words, all other sounds stopped. Not even the rustle of the leaves on the trees could I hear; not even the song of the birds that were nesting there.

For Jesus was saying to me: "Blessed art thou, Simon bar-Jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art a rock, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

## 7. THE ARRIVAL IN JERUSALEM

A WEEK HAS PASSED since John Mark wrote out the last episode in my life—the wonderful recognition by us that Jesus of Nazareth was the long-expected Messiah of the Jews.

In that week much has happened. Our ship touched the shores of Italy, and made port at Rhegium, where for seven days the crew unloaded bushel after bushel of grain, and took on casks of wine and oil and great bales of animal hides for transport to Rome.

For a week John Mark and I and the other passengers stayed in this busy harbor city while the sailors went about their work. How different Rhegium is from the quiet cities of Asia, where I have visited so often over the years. With all the shouting of the mule drivers, the cursing of the Roman troops,

and the haggling at the bazaars, it reminded me of the great turmoil in Jerusalem on the occasion of that first visit I made there many years ago. It brought back all too clearly the memory of the pulsing crowds, the shouting and the tumult.

But now our ship is again under way for the last stage of the voyage, and I must hasten on with my story. When Jesus called me a rock, he did not, of course, speak Greek, in which John Mark is now writing. He spoke—as we all did—in the ancient language of our fathers, and he called me *Kepha*, which was our word for stone and rock. From time to time I have seen this nickname of mine misspelled by Greek and Roman writers as *Cephas*, but that is only ignorance of our beautiful tongue. And as for the word *Peter*, by which I have come to be known to all who live in Rome, that is only a variation on the Greek and Latin word for rock, which is *petros*. John Mark is conversant with many tongues, and he has plainly written all of this down so that those who read may understand how I came by the name Peter. It was given to me by Jesus out of his great love for me, and because of the circumstances in which he gave it to me, it is my dearest possession. However, if any who read this care to call me Simon Peter, that is quite all right. Many people do.

Now, the first thing Jesus did after I recognized

him as the Messiah, the *Christos* as the Greeks say, was to bid us to keep this matter a secret. Almost immediately after he had called me Kepha, he ordered that we should tell no man that he was the Messiah.

There was a very good reason for this, as we all knew. If we went about the countryside proclaiming that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, come to restore Israel and bring the kingdom of heaven into being, it would excite nothing but trouble from the priests in the Temple in Jerusalem. It was necessary first for the people of Israel—all the Jews—to recognize that fact of their own wills, before boldly telling it out among the priests and the Pharisees of the Temple.

And how was it to be brought about that all Israel would recognize him as the Messiah? Late that night we sat awake while he told us.

It was a frightening thing to hear—how the ancient prophecies would come to pass. We should all go to Jerusalem with him, he said, and he would carry his preaching right into the Temple, into the presence of the High Priest. But it was written in the ancient days that the priests would stumble in judgment and err in their vision. Surely enough, Jesus told us, they would not recognize him for the Messiah. Instead, they would imprison him, inflict great harm

upon him, and finally kill him in their wrath. But then, on the third day, he would arise, and then would all Israel know him for the Son of God—the Messiah.

As he told us this, my blood boiled in anger. The very thought that the priests would seek to harm him and imprison him made my blood run like molten iron. Surely we could muster enough strong arms from among the hundreds, nay, thousands of his followers in Galilee, and sweep the Temple clean of the priests and those Pharisees who would not bow down to the Son of God. Rising to my feet I shouted, "Lord, this shall not be unto thee."

I looked about at my fellow disciples, and I saw that they, too, were glancing fire from their eyes. They, too, would have rushed with me to defend him with our very lives.

But as we gathered around him with our pulses running thick with the hot blood of anger, we realized that Jesus was not exulting in our declaration of his defense. I looked at him, and I could not understand. There was no pride in his eyes. There was a very great sadness. With his shoulders bent as if beneath a great weight, he crossed to me, and said: "Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men!"

Then he turned his back on me, and went apart.

I knotted my fists and scourged my face with them. I had only spoken out of my deep love for him and out of my horror that the Messiah would in any way be sought out to harm. And yet, he rebuked me.

Now that I am an old man, and now that all of these mysterious matters are clear to me, I know that he was only sad because I could not understand the will of Almighty God to be that the Messiah should go through suffering and pain and death to redeem mankind. But I did not know it then. How could I know the depths of the will of God? I was but a simple fisherman, who knew not how to interpret the ancient prophecies.

But Jesus was not angry with me. He was only sad that I failed to see clearly how it would all end. After a moment he turned back to me, and explained again that it all had to be the way he told it: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake will find it."

Never before had I thought that this would be the mission of the Messiah when he came to earth, but surely, as God liveth and as my soul liveth, I knew Jesus for the Messiah, and he had told me that it must be so.



Later he told me again, when we were well on our road to Jerusalem: "The Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again."

Still I understood only the smallest part of what he said. The third day? I did not understand what he meant by that. He looked at me and realized that I did not understand.

But he did know this—I had laid down the work of my life to follow him. If it meant that I would have to follow him through the very gates of hell to the world of death, in that moment I vowed that it should be so.

I vowed to myself that I would never leave him, never deny him.

He understood what was passing through my mind, and he smiled at me, to give me strength.

But now I must hasten along in my narrative. So many things happened so fast that in my mind they swirl and wheel like swallows over a fig orchard, and I can recall clearly only the major events of the next few weeks.

For one thing, it approached the Passover time, and Jesus had determined to spend the Passover in

Jerusalem, to make his sacrifice in the holy Temple.

Thus, we marched steadily to the south in our journey, drawing every day closer to the Holy City of our fathers. And our minds were set on the events that we braved to meet in Jerusalem, for it was there that Jesus told us that danger and even death awaited. It was the last week before the Passover festival, and the roads leading into Jerusalem were thronged with pilgrims coming from every corner of the great Roman Empire. Finally, as we came to the village of Bethany, just outside the walls of the city, we could see the hordes of people clogging the highway, and in the morning sun we could catch glimpses of the shining armor of the Roman soldiers who patrolled the roads to keep the peace.

For many minutes Jesus surveyed the host of travelers, and then he turned to John and me, who were standing near him, and he commanded us: "Go ye into the village, and find a colt, and bring him hither."

At first I was mystified, for always before Jesus had walked on his journeys, and we with him. Why these last few thousand paces he wanted to ride a colt, I did not know.

But as I stood in puzzlement, John whispered to me: "That the ancient prophecy of Zechariah may be carried out."

Then I remembered how Zechariah had foretold that the Messiah should enter Jerusalem riding on a colt: "O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass."

Instantly I understood that Jesus was using this means of telling the multitudes that he had come to claim the crown of the Messiah.

Quickly John and I ran into the village and procured a beast for Jesus to ride. When we returned, we found that he and the other ten disciples were already waiting in the center of the highway, surrounded by a great crowd of people who had stopped to join in his march into the Holy City.

Lightly Jesus mounted the nervous beast we had found, but before we could start, someone in the crowd passed up a rich red robe, which I placed over the colt's shoulders. This made the humble animal look for all the world like a potentate's steed.

Then, taking my place as first disciple at the colt's head, I led him out into the throng of travelers. From every direction they streamed to join the line of march behind us, and shortly from their hundreds of throats there could be heard the glorious song: "Hosannah! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!"

As we rounded a bend in the road, we passed a plodding and sour old Pharisee, who looked up askance at our joyous and enthralled company. "Rabbi," he shouted, with obvious distaste in his voice, "rebuke thy disciples."

But Jesus replied in simple dignity: "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

And so in triumph we came to the gates of the Holy City, and entered Jerusalem, where, we knew, the Son of God would restore Israel to her former glory, and would rule over the Gentiles!

## 8. A TRAITOR IN OUR MIDST

WE HAVE ARRIVED at a passage of incidents that John Mark remembers, although he was but a young lad at the time, a very young lad.

But I will introduce him properly when we arrive at that point in the narrative.

For three days we mixed with the hundreds of thousands of devout pilgrims who crowded every corner of the beautiful old city of Jerusalem, the city that King David had established as the earthly dwelling place of Almighty God. And each day a greater and greater crowd gathered in front of the Temple courtyard to hear Jesus preach. Like wildfire the news had spread among the thousands of pilgrims that a holy man had come up from Galilee. Now, you must understand that Jesus never announced himself to the people as the Messiah. The excitement in the city was mostly that the people expected Jesus to announce the coming of the Messiah.

This excitement was brought to a fever pitch by

one dramatic gesture. He cleansed the Temple courtyards of the money changers and the merchants.

You Greek and Roman readers may not know, or may have forgotten, that it is against the religious laws of the Jews to have a graven image on any of our buildings or in any of our household effects. The coins that many of the pilgrims brought to the Temple—being Roman coins—had the head of the Emperor engraved upon them. Coins like these, with a graven image on them, were absolutely forbidden in the Temple. The pilgrims were obliged to change their foreign coins into Jewish money before entering that holy place.

Naturally, some money changers had to be present to make this exchange, but over the years the priests had become so lax in their duties that the money changers and the merchants who sold doves for sacrifice had moved into the very courtyard of the sacred Temple to transact their riotous and profane business. This, Jesus refused to allow.

Overturning their benches and their tables, and lashing at their heels with a whip, he chased them one and all out of the Temple area and into the streets. This was an announcement, stronger than any words, of the mission he had on earth. It was the strongest sign that he could have given us that he meant to bring a new day into dawning.

This gesture of his was not mistaken. To many people it meant that the Messiah was actually coming. When Jesus had finished with his task, the multitudes ran after him, shouting, "Hosannah to the Son of David!"

But—as the next two days were to prove—there was one man who was determined to put a halt to the great work of Jesus, who simply did not believe that the advent of the Messiah was near. That man was one of our very own company.

### JUDAS!

Why it was that our own Judas sought to betray the leader who loved us, none of us was ever able to discover, for he hanged himself immediately after. However, we were later told that he did, indeed, seek out the High Priest and offer to betray Jesus of Nazareth for a price. Thirty pieces of silver was the sum they offered him, and he gladly and greedily took it. The priests were only too happy to find someone who would tell them where Jesus and our company stayed at night. They dared not arrest him in the open Temple yard, for fear of starting a riot among his listeners.

This, of course, we did not know until much, much later. All that we knew the day after Jesus cleansed the Temple was that it was the eve of the Passover, and that the tension was at fever pitch in Jerusalem.

That morning, as we walked up from our camp to Jerusalem, I asked Jesus about the arrangements for the Passover feast. When I asked him, he replied: "Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us."

So John and I left the rest of the company at the gates of Jerusalem, and went with the servant who met us. We recognized him, as we had been told, by the huge water pitcher that he carried on his shoulder.

By many a devious route he took us to a large house where a special friend of Jesus lived. This man was exceedingly kind. On the roof of his house there was a large upper room, set out with eating couches, cooking materials, and all the spices, herbs, and wine necessary to make this particular feast complete. But more than this, the young son of the house was detailed to help John and me prepare the feast. This boy, who was then no more than a young gazelle, was none other than John Mark, himself.

Finally, after a whole day's preparation, the feast was ready, and as it neared the hour of sundown,



Jesus and the other ten of our company arrived. Silently we washed ourselves, as the ancient ceremonies prescribed, and silently we sat at the table.

Some of you readers will wonder why I make the point that we were so silent. Normally the Passover feast was a joyous occasion, for it celebrated the deliverance of our people from the slavery in Egypt. But this night a great presence invaded the room. I called that presence the Spirit of God.

It was simply that all of us were thoroughly aware that God would make his will known that night, and thus we were silent in his presence.

At last, the rhythm of the blessings and the prayers that we said as we ate was broken—by Jesus.

All during the meal we had noticed that some great matter weighed heavily on his heart, but, of course, none of us would ask him what the matter was. We had long ago learned that he would tell us what he wanted us to know in his own good time. This time the matter that he opened to us struck terror to our hearts. Lowering his eyes and looking neither at one of us or another, he said quietly: "Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me."

Betray Jesus! Abandon him and reject him! Give up the faith that he was the Messiah! It was unthinkable! Immediately all of us leapt from our

couches and crowded around him, each of us almost crying with fear and with grief: "Is it I?" "Is it I?"

But he did not answer. Smiling at us like a loving father among frightened children, he bade us take our seats again. But when we had found our places, we could not be quiet. Each of us to his neighbor, back and forth like parrots, kept asking: "Who?" "Who?"

I then noticed that in the confusion my dear friend John had taken a seat immediately next on the right hand of Jesus, and I nodded at him to ask Jesus directly who it would be that would betray him. I could see John ask him the question in a low voice, and I could see Jesus answer, but I could hear nothing, for I was seated at the far end of the table.

At that point the pot of meat and vegetables was served, and, as was our custom, Jesus dipped the pieces of bread in the stew and handed them around to us. The first he handed to Judas, who did not raise his eyes, but took it and began to eat. Then, before dipping another, Jesus leaned across the table to Judas, and said, so loudly that all could hear: "That thou doest, do quickly."

When he heard that command, Judas immediately left the table, gathered his robe around him, and left the room. None of us knew why he left, but simply assumed that Jesus had some urgent errand for him.

After all, Judas did have charge of our money, and it could have been simply an errand to pay the master of the house for the food he had laid in for us.

But as Judas left I saw John's face turn bitter with anger. John, alone of all of us, knew something that made his heart turn cold.

Jesus did not even look up as Judas left. The meal was finished, and it was coming on darkness, and time that we make our way to the place where we were staying for the night.

However, there was one last thing that Jesus did before we left. He rose and took the last fragment of bread from the table, and broke it into small pieces. Passing a piece to each one of us, and blessing the crusts as he passed them, he said: "This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me."

Remembrance of him? We shook our heads among ourselves, for we did not understand. Indeed, it was to be many weeks before we all fully understood the deep meaning of the many events of that night.

Then he took his cup of wine, and blessed it, and passed it around the circle to all of us, saying, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."

We could understand his remark about the new testament, although we could not ponder why he

would say that he would shed his blood for us. In ancient ages the prophet Jeremiah had prophesied that God would make a new covenant, a new bargain, a new testament with mankind, to replace the old one under which we Jews had served since the days of Moses. Truly we knew that the Messiah would bring this new covenant, this new testament into being. But we could not understand how it would be the shedding of his blood that would bring it to pass.

Finally, when we had drunk the wine together, Jesus pulled his robe around his body, and gathered us together. In the ancient custom we sang a hymn, and then made our way from the feasting room.

Out into the darkening streets of Jerusalem we went, and as we made our way down the stairs from the upper room, I turned to John and asked: "Did you ask Jesus who it was that would betray him?"

John grasped my arm and whispered: "Jesus said that it would be he to whom he gave the sop of bread."

The sop of bread! The marrow in my bones chilled. He had given the sop first to Judas.

"Judas?" I whispered.

"Yes . . . Judas."

So it was Judas! Alone of all of us, Judas had come finally to abandon Jesus and to deny that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah!

## 9. THE CAPTURE OF OUR LEADER

HARDLY HAD WE ARRIVED at the little olive grove, called the garden of Gethsemane, where we were to spend the night, than Jesus called us around him. Then he said something that startled us all very much: "All ye shall be offended because of me this night."

Offended?

Again, and perhaps for the tenth time that same night, he had said something that none of us understood. "Offended, master," I cried out, placing my hand on his shoulder to show my deep and abiding affection for him, and also to give him some share of the strength I felt in my own heart. "Surely nothing shall offend us at anything that shall happen with thee."

Jesus reached up and placed his hand over my

own, and he smiled sadly at me, but nonetheless he continued in the same vein: "It is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered."

Again he was speaking in riddles—riddles that seemed utterly confusing when he spoke them, but that became as clear as the sun over the desert as the events of the next few days took place.

But I could not let him talk in this sorrowful manner. I wanted to do everything I could to let him know that his close and dear friends would never abandon him. "Master," I protested, "though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended."

There was a long pause, and he looked at me steadily. In the light of the moon I could see his eyes studying me, with both sorrow and love alight in their depths. At last he shook his head slowly, and told me: "Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice."

Deny Jesus of Nazareth! Clenching my fists and raising them over my head in horror at the thought, I answered him directly: "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee!"

And each of the others raised their fists in the sight of Jesus, to let him know that they would follow him to death, if necessary. All of them repeated what I had said: "I, too, master! I, too!"

Again Jesus smiled at us, and then he changed the subject. Indicating that they should throw their robes on the ground, he bade the others sleep. James and John and me he took aside. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful," he said. "Tarry ye here, and watch with me."

He then led us to a little rocky cleft a few yards away from the others, and he indicated that we should sit at the foot of the knoll, while he mounted it to pray. As the clouds scudded across the sky, now opening the moon to view and now hiding it, we watched. From time to time, as the moonlight broke through, we could see Jesus kneeling on top of the rock with his head bowed in his hands, deep in his prayer.

Once, when the little gusts of wind were absent, I could hear his hoarse whisper: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

And in the next breath, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

Then, as the breeze rose again, I could hear no more. My head nodded from the great weariness of the day, and I dozed in sleep. The next thing I knew, Jesus was standing over me. I awoke quickly and struggled to my feet. James and John had not heard him come down from the rock. They, too, had fallen asleep.

"Simon," said Jesus gently, "could ye not watch

with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

"O master," I whispered in shame for having fallen asleep, "I will not abandon my courage. Whatever shall come, I shall stand steadfast."

Jesus smiled, and walked slowly back to his lonely post on top of the rock, and resumed his long and thoughtful prayer. And then—I am shamed to recall it—I fell asleep again. And again Jesus found me sleeping, but he did not rebuke me. "O Simon," he said, "be strong, be strong."

A third time he retired to the rock, and a third time—more shame—I fell asleep.

But this time it was not the gentle voice of Jesus that wakened me. Out from the depths of my drugged sleep I awoke to hear the clatter of swords and armor. It was like a nightmare. My eyes were practically forced open by the glare of lanterns shining in my face. Leaping to my feet, I saw John and James also waking suddenly from their troubled sleep, and, a few paces back in the grove, the rest of our company stumbling to their feet.

The lanterns were held before our faces by a company of Temple guards, ugly brutes with grimaces of satisfaction on their evil faces.

For a long moment there was silence as we looked



at the guard, and the guard at us. And then, out from behind the soldiers of the guard, there stepped—Judas, of our own company!

“What is Judas doing with the Temple watch?” I whispered to Bartholomew, who stood nearest me.

But Bartholomew knew no more than I did.

Then Jesus broke the strained silence. As Judas came forward, Jesus called out to us: “He is at hand that doth betray me!”

Straight out from the soldiers walked Judas, across the little patch of ground that separated the two groups of us and directly up to Jesus, whom he saluted with a kiss on the cheek, as a brother kisses a brother.

Jesus did not move, nor did he seek to return the kiss. Calmly he stood, as a sentry at his post, and as Judas backed away, he asked him: “Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?”

Instantly the soldiers nodded to each other and started slowly forward. Now, I began to realize the true meaning of many of the riddles Jesus had proclaimed to us. There would be bloodshed and fighting! The kingdom of heaven was surely to come to pass, but only through a terrible struggle.

Calling on the other ten disciples who seemed unsure of what to do, I unloosed my sword from its

## 10. THE TRIAL IN THE TEMPLE

YES, WE SCATTERED LIKE LAMBS. Just as Jesus had prophesied, we scattered like sheep before the terrors of the lions of Judea. Even John Mark remembers that frightening hour upon the Mount of Olives. Months later he admitted to me that he had followed us away from his father's house, and had been hiding among the thickets to watch us. When the soldiers sought to take us, and when we fled, John Mark took also to his heels and barely escaped with his life. One of the soldiers, as a matter of fact, had caught a corner of his robe and torn it from his back, leaving the boy nothing but a thin loincloth covering him as he ran home in the dark of the night.

For several hundred paces I fled in the darkness alone. Finally, when I could no longer hear the soldiers shouting after me, I stopped.

After several minutes, when it became plain that the soldiers were not going to waste their energies tracking me down, my courage rose. I had to see what would happen! I had to follow Jesus and find out how they would punish him.

Thus, like a stealthy fox on the trail of a hare, I took a roundabout way back into the city and ran through the darkness to the great plaza before the Temple.

Even at that late hour the streets were not empty. Beggars, restless pilgrims, and curious onlookers came and went in the shadows, and it was no trouble at all to fall in amongst them and hide from the stony stares of the guards who manned the gateway.

Within a matter of minutes my patience was repaid. Far down the dark streets I heard the tramp of marching men and the rattling of the stubby swords that the watchmen of the Temple wore. Around the last corner the little company came, and when they entered the pool of light cast by the huge torches on the gateway, I could see my master, Jesus of Nazareth, walking in the center of them.

When they came to take him in the garden of Gethsemane, I had thought they would only imprison him, and perhaps give him the forty lashes that are saved for hardened criminals. Not that he would earn any such punishment, but that the priests

often used that way of warning troublesome Galileans and others from the provinces not to venture up to Jerusalem again.

But this night the Great Council was assembled in session. I knew that the matter was much more serious!

"What are they going to do?" I asked a guard, who lounged by the doorway of the common room munching from a leathern sack of figs.

"This carpenter fellow, this Jesus of Nazareth, they are bringing him to trial for his life," the guard answered me.

"Trial for his life!" I whispered hoarsely. "On what grounds? How can they do this?"

"Blasphemy," the guard replied. "One of his disciples says that he claims to be the Messiah. That is blasphemy against the Lord God, for a human being to claim to be the Son of God."

The guard spat out the stem of his fig and reached into his sack for another. "They are holding this trial at night, so that this fellow's followers won't hear of it until it is over," he told me, biting into his fig. "We had enough trouble getting this one. If the Galileans should hear about it, they might riot, and we'd have the Romans on our shoulders. Then the fur would fly for certain."

It did not take them long to get the trial started.

The High Priest had armed himself well with false witnesses. As Jesus stood with bound hands before the council, the first of these false witnesses came forward. "This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days," he reported.

Never in my hearing had Jesus said any such thing, but it made no difference. This witness was in the pay of the priests.

When the witness had been heard, the High Priest arose, and asked Jesus: "Answerest thou nothing?"

Jesus only looked at him silently. The charge was too ridiculous even to be answered. And that enraged the High Priest. Putting aside all idea of any more witnesses, he then shouted at Jesus: "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God."

Jesus paused a long moment before he answered, and then, directly to the High Priest, he replied: "Thou hast said!"

And to make the matter even more clear, he did not stop. He continued, raising his hands high above his head and shouting: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven!"

There was dead silence. We waited. Then, as the moments passed, a mumble and a mutter started

among the councilors as the priests and the elders nodded to each other in satisfaction. With an evil grin on his face, the High Priest turned to them at last and tore the hem of his robe. This was the custom among our people in the presence of blasphemy, and the High Priest was claiming that Jesus had blasphemed against Almighty God by announcing that he would sit at God's right hand.

"He hath spoken blasphemy," shrieked the High Priest. "What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye?"

To my horror, the members of the Great Council raised their voices in a harsh chorus: "He is guilty of death!"

Death! They were condemning the Messiah to death!

I could not believe it. My whole world seemed to totter beneath me, and I nearly fainted.

But it was true! Jesus had let them capture him like any common thief, and now he had let them condemn him to death like a mortal man. As I watched, the councilors stepped forward and spat upon him and cursed him and struck him with their fists.

Suddenly, I was conscious of another terror. A slave girl in the crowd was staring at me as if she

recognized me for one of Jesus' followers. Turning suddenly to a guard who was standing next to her, she pointed her finger at me and called out: "Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee!"

I clutched my robe around my face, and looked quickly for a way to leave the Temple courtyard. I knew that if they found me there the councilors would probably call for my death, too. I was known to be one of his disciples. The very least they would do would be to give me forty lashes. To protect myself, I shouted back at the girl, "I know not what thou sayest."

But she was not so easily to be deceived. There was another slave girl with her, and as I pushed my way through the crowd, the first one spoke to the second and pointed me out, and then the second shouted: "This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth!"

"No, no, no," I cried. "I do not know the man." Pushing ahead blindly, I tried in vain to get out of sight, but the very pack of onlookers to the trial hemmed me in. As I struggled, a great burly guard held on to my arm and peered into my face: "Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee."

My Galilean way of speaking had trapped me, and in a frenzy I sought to break away. Cursing the

guard, I pushed him aside, and screamed: "I know not the man."

I took a deep breath, and was about to push my way the last few steps out of the courtyard when I heard the sound that announced the morning—the crowing of a rooster from some nearby rooftop.

And as I heard it, there tumbled suddenly into my confused mind the memory of something Jesus had said to me earlier: "This night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice."

I turned and looked back. Jesus had heard the shrill cry of the bird, just as I had, and he had turned to look at me.

For a brief instant our eyes met across the short plaza that separated us, and in that instant all the sorrow that I felt in my heart for this man who was not the Messiah flooded my heart. We had all believed in him. And he had believed in himself. But now it was all over, and they were taking him away to the Roman governor to ask permission to execute him.

I grieved for all the Jews in Israel who had waited so long for the Messiah to come, and for this man who had so inflamed their hopes.

In my grief I ran from the courtyard out into the dark streets of Jerusalem.

I was crying bitterly.



## 11. JOURNEY'S END ON GOLGOTHA

AS DAWN BROKE over the turbulent city, I could not rest. Like a man possessed of devils, I roamed the streets. It was as if the very tiring of my body by the ceaseless walking up and down could still the sorrow in my heart.

At last I stopped my endless roaming. I was so tired that I could not move another step, but still the grief in my heart rocked me like a volcano. Giving up the struggle to escape from the memories of the tragic events of the night, I let myself be drawn into the multitude that had gathered outside the gates of the Temple. By the time the sun was well overhead it seemed that everybody in Jerusalem had heard that Jesus of Nazareth had been found to be a false Messiah and had been condemned to death by the Great Council. Like an endless forest of trees

the multitude waited for the High Priest to come out of his chambers with his prisoner and seek audience with Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator. Pilate alone could approve the sentence of death.

I kept the fires of hope burning in my heart. I could not leave the spot, for I kept hoping against hope that the final miracle of all would take place—that the legions of angels would descend from the skies and deliver him to the throne.

But it did not happen. There is no need to set down again the tragic details. Jesus was haled before Pontius Pilate for judgment, but Pilate refused to hear him. He sent him before Herod Antipas, for Herod was the Tetrarch of Galilee, and Jesus was a Galilean.

But Herod would have no more to do than Pilate with the fate of Jesus. He maintained that the blasphemy had been committed in Jerusalem, in Judea, and that Pilate—the governor of Judea—would have to pass the judgment.

I will say that Pilate made an effort to calm the priests and to persuade them to release Jesus with forty lashes. He seemed to understand that Jesus was a righteous and just man, even if he was not the Messiah, and that he deserved better than the punishment of death. But the priests would not hear of it. They demanded the sentence of death for Jesus,

and in disgust Pilate gave up to them. Calling for a basin of water, he washed his hands as a sign that he would have nothing to do with the matter. "I am innocent of the blood of this just person," he announced from the porch of his palace, and then he turned Jesus over to the soldiers to carry out the sentence of death.

Every hour that passed—and it was now near noon of the day—my hope sank lower. Still, there was some hope left, so long as Jesus was alive. Somehow I kept hoping in my heart that at the last minute, just before the final blow would be aimed, Jesus would rise up in his might and strike the soldiers to the ground and summon those of us who had been his followers to bring the kingdom into being.

But the hours passed, and nothing happened. From the plaza in front of Pilate's palace the soldiers led Jesus out to the field of skulls, where the public executions were held. This horrible spot, outside the city walls, had long been known among the Jerusalemites by its name in our ancient tongue—Gul-Gotha. There the final agony was performed. The soldiers nailed Jesus to a cross of wood like a common criminal and left him there to die.

When at last he hung by his hands upon the cross, my heart broke with pity, and I could not bear to watch any longer. Nothing would happen now. It

was too late. The dream of the coming of the kingdom turned out to be, after all, nothing but a tragic nightmare with a bitter ending.

Aching in every bone of my body from weariness and sorrow, and with a fever raging in my head, I turned my dragging steps back to the village of Bethany, where those of us who remained had arranged to spend the Sabbath in the seclusion of a friend's house. It was now the evening before the Sabbath.

All that long Sabbath I remained in a darkened room, crying out prayers for the dead and grieving over the events that had happened. But most of all, I grieved that Jesus' last memory of me should be my denial of him. As I grieved, I knew that I would take the mark of that shame to the grave with me. And yet, when it had happened, there had seemed to be no other way to save my life except to deny that I knew him.

Finally, as the Sabbath night wore on, my wells of grief dried up, and I began to gather my strength for the long march back to Capernaum. It was near the dawn of the third day, now, since his trial and death, but I knew that life would go on as it had before, and that the sooner Andrew and I, and John and James, and the others got out of Jerusalem and

back to our fishing, the better it would be for all of us.

As morning broke on that third day, I began to gather up my scanty belongings and to prepare for the march.

And then—it happened.

There had been certain women in our company, women who had followed Jesus as faithfully as had we, and whose love for him had been unsurpassed. I list these women so that the ages shall never forget how their love was repaid! To them God gave the honor of first knowing about the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth! These women were Mary of the town of Magdala, Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome—all of whom, among other women, had also been present at the cross.

Now, as I was packing my belongings and making ready for the march back to Galilee, there was a loud knocking upon the lower door of the house, and I heard the voice of Mary of Magdala asking for me: "Simon Peter," she was calling. "Simon Peter! He has risen! He has risen!"

I was so busy with my packing and with my thoughts of all the many things that awaited my doing back in Capernaum, that at first I could not make sense out of Mary's anguished shouts.

But the one phrase—he has risen! Like a blinding

flash, that brought back to my mind a dark and mysterious matter that Jesus had told me many weeks ago in Galilee. "The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified," he had told me. And further: "the third day rise again."

Dropping my parcel of food where I had been wrapping it, I ran down the stairs. "What did you say?" I called to Mary, when I reached the bottom of the stairs. The three women were still many paces away from me—standing across the inner court of the house.

"Very early this morning we went to the sepulchre," cried Mary of Magdala, her cheeks flushed with excitement.

"A sepulchre belonging to Joseph of Arimathea, where we laid the body of Jesus," put in Salome, knowing that I had not remained for the burial.

"But the tomb was empty," whispered Mary, mother of James. "The great rock that the soldiers had wheeled up to close the door was gone, and the tomb was empty."

"He has risen! He has risen!" Mary of Magdala could do nothing more than chant the frightening phrase over and over.

But Mary, the mother of James, silenced her. "It is true that he has risen," she said. "Outside the tomb, when we were frightened, two heavenly beings ac-

costed us and told us that our Lord had risen. 'Why seek ye the living among the dead?' they said. 'He is not here, but is risen.' "

By now some of the other disciples had come down the stairs to see the cause of the commotion. "He is risen! He is risen!" Mary of Magdala kept chanting.

"What think you, Simon Peter?" asked Bartholomew. "What do the women mean?"

"They seek to tell us that Jesus has risen from the grave," I replied. But I could see on Bartholomew's face, and on the faces of the others who were listening, that they did not believe.

"Their minds are warped by sorrow," said Andrew, and he turned and made his way back up to his packing.

"Take them back to the house where they are staying that they may be comforted," put in John, for he, too, thought only that they were overcome with grief.

"You will come and see," Mary of Magdala begged me, turning her back on the others of us who would not credit the story that the women brought.

For a long moment I thought, and then I decided to go back to Jerusalem with them. If they were only overwrought and the victims of foolish visions, it would be better that a man be with them to lead

them to the house where they were staying, and to see to their care.

But even more than that, I did want to see for myself.

Throughout all the long night and day of my silent grief one flicker of hope had sustained me. Despite the fact that he had been nailed to the cross and buried for dead, I somehow knew that the story of Jesus of Nazareth was not yet over and that something yet was to happen.

I had denied him on the night of his trial.

Never again would I deny him, if the slightest chance remained that he had escaped death and had arisen from the grave, as the grieving women said.



## 12. THE MAGNIFICENT MIRACLE

YES, IT WAS AS THE WOMEN had said. When I arrived at the tomb with them, I found it empty. The rock that the soldiers had placed against the doorway lay on its side apart from the grotto and, inside, the linen burial shroud lay on the stone bier on the burial rock, spread out as if to cover a body. But the body of Jesus was gone!

My first thought was that the Romans or the priests had stolen his body away so that in future years we who had followed after him would not make a shrine of the spot and keep his memory alive by worshiping at the shrine. But I discarded that idea. Only the Greeks and Romans made divinities of their dead and sought to keep alive their memories. It was against our Jewish custom to do so. Thus, the Romans would not have stolen the body. Nor would the priests, being Jewish.

Except for that, there seemed no other explanation of why the tomb was empty. If he had truly risen from the dead, as the women said the angels had told them, then he should be marching through Jerusalem at the head of an avenging army, seeking to capture the throne of Jewry.

But there was no noise of a heavenly catastrophe in the city. Calmly the citizens slept in the early morning hours, and the only noises were those of peaceful animals making their salutations to the sun.

No—there was no answer to the question. Only one thing I did know, and that was that I would remain in Jerusalem until the veil of mystery should be torn aside.

Leaving the women in the house where they were staying, I made my way thoughtfully back to Bethany. The others asked me what I had found, and I could only tell them the fact—that I had found the grave empty, but nothing more.

For a long hour we talked about the matter, but could not arrive at an answer. We sensed that we were standing in an hour in the history of mankind when things of great magnitude were taking place, but as so often before, we were like ignorant babes in a strange world.

All we could agree upon was to remain in Jerusalem until later events should show us where and

when we should go. But we would not try to decide this for ourselves. We awaited a sign from God.

I have long since learned that God gives his signs in strange ways and in his own good time. That morning I was fully content to stay in Jerusalem for months, if need be, until God should set the time to make his sign to me. All I knew was that in his own good time that sign would come.

It did. It came that very same day.

We were seated at our midday meal, the eleven of us and several followers of Jesus from Galilee. Already the rumor had started to make its way around Jerusalem that Jesus had risen from the dead, and that I had seen him and spoken with him.

"It is not so," I kept telling the newcomers who sought us out to hear about this great matter. "I went to the sepulchre, and I found the stone rolled away and the grave empty. I saw the burial shroud tossed aside. It appeared to me that he has indeed risen from the dead, but I have not seen him."

And then the onlookers would mutter among themselves. "It appears to Simon that he has arisen," they would say, and nod their heads in wonder.

I kept trying to tell them that I knew nothing for certain, but they would scarcely listen. Try as I might, I could not get them to hear me, and it began to worry me, for if the rumor got to the High Priest

that I had seen and spoken with the risen person of Jesus, then surely all of us who were his disciples would be hunted down and killed for seeking to keep alive a rumor that would be troublesome to the peace of Jerusalem.

Then, while we were arguing, the door burst open, and all sense fled from the discussion.

"We have seen him," cried Cleopas, who was wild of eye and out of breath from running.

Cleopas was one of the Galilean followers who stayed in our company. With him was another man from Capernaum.

"We have seen him," Cleopas repeated. "He is risen from the dead!"

Leaving from my seat, I shook Cleopas by the shoulders. "Tell us straight out, Cleopas, what has happened."

I think the very force of my shaking drove the wildness from his eyes and put sense back in his head, for he calmed down, and, after a minute to catch his breath, told us that he and his companion had actually seen and spoken with Jesus in the village of Emmaus, which lay an hour's walk from where we were staying.

There was no denying Cleopas' story. He told it in accurate details three separate times, word for word. Small chance there was now of stopping any trou-

blesome rumors, for it began to appear to all of us that Jesus had, indeed, risen from the dead, and that in his own good time he would make himself known to all of us.

The muttering and the talking ceased. The idea of the resurrection of Jesus from the grave was too big a matter for our minds to comprehend. Silently we sat and pondered this overwhelming miracle.

Now I began to understand the great mystery that God had given into our hands to share. Quietly I spoke to those who had gathered with us. "Now I know what Jesus meant when he said, 'This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.' And I know what he meant when he said, 'This is my body which is given for you,' when he broke the bread."

"You understand the subtle meaning of that strange ritual that he gave to us?" asked John, unbelieving. For all the years we had known each other, John had looked upon me as a good fellow, but a donkey at best.

John could read and interpret many of the ancient texts, and was known among us to be a scholar among the scholars of the synagogue. It was not that John was chiding me, when he spoke like that. It was only that he did not believe that I understood any of the mystic matters of which I spoke.

"Yes," I announced proudly to John. "The ritual that Jesus gave to us when he broke the bread and shared the wine at our last supper together was his dark and mystic way of telling us that he would be killed, his blood spilled and his body broken, that all of the ancient prophecies would come to pass. And now he has indeed arisen, and his resurrection is token of the New Covenant that God has given to all mankind. All this has been prophesied since ancient days, and now it has come to pass."

They all shook their heads and turned back to the business of muttering. I could hear Bartholomew whisper to Matthew: "Poor Simon, he is no better than the women, who see visions and dream dreams in open daylight."

But John was kinder. Slowly he shook his head, and slowly he walked away to look out of the window and study what I had told him. All he said, and he said it only to himself, was: "I do not know what to believe. I do not know."

At that moment, it happened!

Even while the others were pondering what I had said, Jesus appeared—this time to the whole company.

Instantly the others fell back against the wall in fright, but I knew. I knew that Jesus lived not in Sheol, where the spirits of the dead wander forever,

but that he now lived eternally among all mankind. Smiling, I walked forward toward him, and smiling, he greeted me.

Then, to the others, he spoke: "Peace be unto you. Why are ye troubled? And why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."

Slowly, as they realized that it was Jesus himself, the others came forward, dumbly to stare at him. Gently he explained the great mystery of the Messiah, and how he had been killed to redeem mankind, and how he had gone to the grave, only to rise again to prove the greatness of God's love and mercy and to show them that any who believed in him should not perish, but should have everlasting life. "Thus is it written," he said, "and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things."

They smiled eagerly, and reached out their hands toward him. They were beginning to understand, as I did. And now, for the first time, he was telling us precisely what he expected of us, the little company of Galileans who had followed him from the first.

We were to preach all these things in his name, beginning in Jerusalem.

"We have waited, master, for just this hour," I cried out. He turned to me, and continued: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

"Shall we not, then, return to our homes and our families in Galilee, and preach in our own synagogues?" spoke up John, eager as always for precise details.

"Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem," Jesus replied, "until ye be endued with power from on high."

Power from on high? We looked at each other, and Andrew opened his mouth as if to question Jesus. Again, he had spoken to us in riddles. We none of us knew what he meant when he said to tarry in Jerusalem until we should be endued with power from on high.

But I raised my hands to my lips, and stopped my brother Andrew from his question. In sore struggle I had learned never to question our master, Jesus, for all things would come as he proclaimed, even though we understood them not. I had doubted and denied him, but now I had learned. We would tarry in Jeru-



saalem, and in due course we would be endued with power from on high. Whatever that was, we would know when the time was ready. We did not know it now. We only knew that we had been told to wait.

Folding his robe about his waist, Jesus turned, then, and led us out of the door. Slowly, believing yet unbelieving, and rubbing their eyes and shaking their heads, the disciples followed after him, and I last. Cleopas and the others who had gathered with us made as if to follow, but a sign from me held them back. Not a word was spoken, but they understood that Jesus might want to go alone with his nearest followers.

Up the roadway toward Jerusalem he led us, and, turning off the road, past the garden of Gethsemane and to the highest pinnacle of the Mount of Olives. There, he gathered us about him and looked deeply into our eyes. None of us spoke, but I felt that he was awaiting one more question from us. I knew that question, for it was hanging heavy on my heart: the last final question of all.

At last I braved the silence, and spoke up: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

Jesus smiled. That was the question that he wanted us to ask, so that all men should know. The kingdom of heaven had not come into being, but was yet to

come. Slowly he told us: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

This was the answer I had wanted. That it was not for us to know the time or the season of the coming of the kingdom of heaven, but that we should continue to preach, as he had taught us, that man should repent his sins to prepare for the kingdom. We all of us now understood, and we nodded our heads slowly as the sure knowledge grew in our hearts. Then, as we watched, Jesus raised his hands over our heads, as in a blessing, and a cloud from the upper skies settled down over him like a great robe. Mistily, half hidden by the cloud, we could see that he ascended into heaven.

For a long while we stood silently, as only men can stand who have felt God's presence among them. There was no fear or terror of unknown matters, now, for we understood. At last, as we had been standing there so long, there appeared two men in gleaming white apparel. Not far from us they seemed to stand, and yet far, far from our mortal grasp. "Ye men of Galilee," one of them spoke out, "why stand

ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

Truly they were chiding us gently for not taking matters simply as we had seen them, and getting on about our business, which now lay in Jerusalem. Summoning the others to my side, I said: "Come, Jesus will return in a like manner in his own time and his own season. These two heavenly beings have so promised us. Let us get about the business to which he appointed us."

Together we all went down into Jerusalem and to the house of John Mark's family, where it was agreed that we should seek to stay in the same upper room where we had feasted. We would stay there until it was told us what we should do.

When the word was noised about Jerusalem that we eleven disciples had seen Jesus of Nazareth arisen from the dead, and had spoken with him, there quickly came to join our little company about one hundred and twenty devout followers of his who had believed him truly to be the Messiah, and who now awaited divine commands to tell them what they should do to carry the gospel, the good tidings of his message, to the world. Each day we gathered in the courtyard of the house that had been given over to us, and we talked of the wondrous things

that had befallen us. Not through any effort of mine to seek to become pre-eminent in this company, but simply because Jesus had chosen me first in Galilee, they came to look upon me as their captain. Naturally, I put all my heart and mind into the matter of interpreting the words and deeds of Jesus as best I could to our followers, and to train them suitably to carry out the commands that Jesus had given—to teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

At last, on the fiftieth day of our waiting, the miracle that we had been preparing ourselves for took place. The spirit of God descended upon us.

As usual, we had met as a group in the morning to break bread together and refresh ourselves in the promises of Jesus. It was the Pentecost, that ancient feast that we Jews had celebrated since the beginning of history—the feast to celebrate the reaping of the barley and to thank God for the generous fruits of the land. As was our ancient custom, we Jews were filled with the joy of our knowledge that God had chosen us for his special mercies, and as was the custom, Jews from all the provinces came again to Jerusalem, as they did for the Passover, to make the holy celebration. It was entirely fitting that God should choose this particular day to endue us with power from on high.

It came about in this way. As we were seated in the courtyard of the house, completing our morning prayers, there came a sound from the skies as of a tremendous wind. It was such a sound as would frighten any man, for it was the sound that always accompanied the terrible winds that felled houses, uprooted trees, and turned the day into darkness. But there was no wind! There was only the great noise in the sky, while not a breeze stirred the air.

As the noise passed through the streets and came to center in the house where we were staying, lightning seemed to play over our heads, touching now one of us, now another. But there were none of us who felt the slightest pain or burn. It was not like the bolts that consumed cities and destroyed villages. It was more like a flash of pure white light.

When this had passed, behold, all of us arose, and found that we had been blessed with an amazing power. Truly it had come from on high, as had been promised, for we found that no matter what man listened to us, he could understand us in his own tongue.

After the news of the terrible sound and lightning had been noised around Jerusalem, there quickly gathered around this house Jews of every nation. There were pilgrims from Parthia, Media, Elam, Cappadocia, Pontus, Pamphylia, and, in fact, from

every province of the Roman Empire and the world that lay around it.

"Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?" cried those who had come to witness the source of the strange noise.

"Yes," others would answer, "but now we hear every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born!"

Despite the fact that everybody who could listen could understand us, the very fact that so many of those who listened answered back in their own tongues and were answered by us made the impious listeners scorn us. "These men are full of new wine," called one loud-mouthed mule driver.

Mounting a stone step, I raised my hands to quiet the multitude, and I called out to the scoffers: "Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."

Now all of those who heard me, and who sought after the restoration of Israel and the coming of the

kingdom of heaven, realized that I had spoken truly. As the prophet Joel had foretold, the day had come when all men and all women were speaking in tongues and prophesying.

When our listeners realized how truly the ancient prophecy of Joel was coming to pass, and that we were truly endued with power from on high, it was like the breaking of an earthen dam and the loosing of great waters. No less than three thousand of those who had come to scoff broke through the gates to pledge their belief in Jesus, the Messiah, and to accept baptism from us in his name.

Truly, the congregation of Israel was restored. The new covenant between God and mankind was forged, and these three thousand people became the congregation of God's new testament with mankind.

Jesus had said that he would build a church, a congregation, upon the rock of my faith in him as the Son of God. These people were the seed of his church.

## 13. PRISON BARS

LAST NIGHT, AS THE SUN SET over the western waters, our ship put into port at the harbor of Puteoli, and now our journey by sea is done. As the sailors began the back-breaking task of unloading the heavy casks and bales into the great wagons that will carry them up the hundred miles that lie between here and Rome, we travelers refreshed ourselves with a long night's sleep in the sturdy beds of a roadside inn, and made ready for our own march to the great capital of the empire.

Only six more days lie ahead of us before we shall be united with our dear Christian brethren in the great city, and I shall have to hasten to finish all of my tale by the time we come to Tres Tabernae. Beyond that town we shall have no time, for we shall be too taken up with greeting our friends who will journey out to meet us there, when news is brought to them by swift horses that our ship has landed.



So, John Mark will have to catch the story the way a swallow catches crumbs cast in the wind—by dipping here and dipping there, listening to me as we walk and making his rough notes by lamplight when we put up for sleeping.

From that day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon us all, I remained in Jerusalem for fourteen years. At my orders, my beloved and dutiful wife sold my fishing boat and sold my home, and came to Jerusalem to live with me in the company of the men and women who had known Jesus. Not once have I been back in Capernaum, although the preaching of Jesus has taken me into every province of hither Asia, as well as into Greece and Italia.

During these years our little company of Nazarenes, as we came to be called, grew almost daily, until it enrolled many hundreds, even thousands, of devout Jews in its ranks. Although many Greeks and Romans no longer look upon us as Jews, but hate us even more as Christians, in those days we were Jews of the Jews, more righteous than the Pharisees and more surely guardians of the Law of Moses than the Sadducees. We went every day to the Temple and observed every feast and fasting with the utmost purity. The only difference between us and all our fellow Jews was that we knew Jesus of Nazareth for the Messiah, while the others looked upon him only

as a prophet, and continued to await another to come as the Messiah.

And during those years—up until the very end of my stay in Jerusalem—we enjoyed our share of peace. Our rulers had killed Jesus, but at first they did not seem to care that we remained behind, preaching the Risen Christ that Jesus had truly been.

However, as our preaching gathered more and more followers, we, too, came in for blame and curse, and eventually for punishment and death.

But let me tell you how our first trouble with the priests came about. John and James and I shared the leadership of this group of Jerusalem Nazarenes, not because we had sought any pre-eminence, but simply because we had been closest to Jesus and because Jesus had so often come to confide particular mysteries to us. Thus, we often walked together as we carried out our preaching tasks.

Now Jesus had taught us to call on the power of God to heal the sick, to cast out devils, and to forgive sins. These powers had been renewed by the miracle at Pentecost. And it was this divine power that marked us in the eyes of the priests as the special agents of Jesus, whom they had crucified to stop his preachings.

One afternoon, shortly after Pentecost, John and I had come up to the Temple to perform our evening

sacrifice. Just outside the gate of the Temple there awaited us a crippled man. We had often seen him lying there on his pallet, for every morning his sons carried him there to ask for alms. We had often seen him, but we had never spoken to him, nor he to us. Until that day.

Whether he knew us for disciples of Jesus the Christ or not, I cannot say. However, on this one day he made a great effort when we passed, and managed to reach up and clutch the hem of my robe in one of his crippled hands. "Alms, master, please give me alms," he begged.

I had never before helped a man simply because he was bent and broken. In the past I had only used the great power of Jesus' name to heal those who had come to me, in his name, asking to be healed by God. But this day I felt it my duty to offer God's mercy in the name of Jesus to this man, even though he had never even heard of the Messiah. I stopped and turned to him. "Look on us," I commanded, so loudly that a number of other worshipers on their way to the Temple heard me and stopped to watch.

The beggar cringed back from me, as if he were afraid I might strike him. But I was only raising my hands over his head to bless him. "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk!"

With that, I reached out my hands and lifted him to his feet. In that instant he looked into my eyes, and he could see that my faith was strong enough to give him faith. I could see faith in Jesus lighting his own eyes, and I could feel the strength flowing back into his withered bones. I stepped away from him, and, for the first time in his life, he found that he could walk without help.

Like wildfire in a field of dry grain, the news of this wonder spread through the Temple, and within a few moments John and I were surrounded by a multitude of worshipers, who stared at us with amazement in their eyes.

To me, this was an opportunity sent by Heaven. They had seen the sign of the power of Christ, and now I proceeded to tell them how it had come about. To my lips there sprang the words of a gospel sermon—the very one that I have used on many other occasions since that time, in synagogues in every province of the eastern Empire. “Ye men of Israel,” I called out, “why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. And

his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

While I was speaking, a number of priests and guards rushed out to see the cause for the great gathering in the Temple court. They listened, and when they discovered that the followers of Jesus had not gone back to Galilee, but were preaching in the Temple, they were very troubled. But what troubled them even more was that all the rest of that day John and I received converts in the Temple court. More than two thousand of the onlookers came forward to protest their faith in Jesus and to beg for baptism in his name.

Truly, as I heard one horrified priest tell another, the little company of Galileans had grown so large that Jerusalem seemed almost to overflow with them.

And so, to halt the growth of this new sect of our ancient faith, John and I had no sooner left the Temple court to return to our house than we were cruelly seized by guards and hustled into the dark and evil-smelling dungeon beneath the Temple walls. "The blasphemy that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah must be stopped at all costs," sneered one of the

priests to us when the lock was turned. "If you two are to be the cost, then it will be well paid."

The following morning the new High Priest, Annas, summoned us before the Great Council for trial. The first thing I noticed was that the priests did not speak brazenly or evilly to us, as they had to Jesus. They spoke with some hesitation and with some fear in their voices. After all, it comforted me and John to know, they realized that we had God's divine power in our hands, and they seemed fearful that we might use it against them. Finally, after staring at us for some moments, the High Priest asked me: "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?"

He was speaking of the miracle of the cripple's cure.

"Be it known unto you all," I replied, "and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand before you whole."

When I had answered thus, they whispered amongst themselves, and from what I could overhear, it became clear that they were actually afraid of the power of Jesus. They had denied him as the Messiah, but at the same time, they dared not affront God by condemning to death any men, like our-

selves, who so obviously had some direct commission from God. Finally they seemed to agree that they should not punish us, but should only try to frighten us. "Go ye now," the High Priest commanded us, "but speak no more in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, neither preach ye of him!"

I smiled, for I recalled what Jesus had said on the road to Jerusalem, when the Pharisee had cautioned him to keep us from singing his praises. "If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

It was that way with us now. If we had tried to keep silent, the very stones in the walls of Jerusalem would have cried out. Converts came to us by the hundreds seeking to be enrolled with the followers of the man from Nazareth. Every day brought new ones down from Galilee, up from the south, and even from abroad, from Egypt and from Persia. Our fame as the apostles of Jesus the Messiah spread with every traveler, and back from the corners of the Empire with every caravan came more and more people to seek forgiveness of their sins and to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

For several weeks this continued, and every day the priests and the Pharisees worried more. Finally, they could stand it no longer. It began to seem that the Nazarene sect of Jewry would soon be larger

than all the others unless drastic action were taken. So, they took action.

Again they arrested me, and this time they took all of the other apostles into prison with me. Their plan was to cut down the tree of the faith in Jesus by destroying its roots. We, the apostles who had come with Jesus up from Galilee, we were the roots.

This time there was no hearing before the High Priest. Instead, down into the darkest corner of the dungeon they hurled us, and there they left us. After some hours a guard arrived to fetch us water and some crusts, and because I saw that he was not born an evil fellow, I managed to get him into conversation.

"What are their plans for us, guard?" I asked. "Forty lashes? Or is it a trial before the Great Council?"

The guard looked at me with scorn, but mixed with a little pity. "I am not a priest," he said. "I am only a guard doing my duty, and I don't like it here any better than you do. However, you need not worry about the lash. My captain says they're simply going to forget you. Leave the pack of you here until everybody has forgotten you. Maybe that way they'll stop your preaching, unless you can stand to preach to yourselves."

So that was it, and a cruel and cunning plan it



was. It had been done before. Neither punish a man nor try him, but leave him in the dungeon until his very mother and father forgot that he had ever lived. Then turn him loose to die of confusion and starvation.

We knew that only the power of God could release us from the prison, and so we prayed. All of us simply placed our faith in the Master we were serving, and the God who had sent our Master to us. We knew that if it were God's will that we spend our lives in prison, there we would spend them. But if it were his will that the doors be opened to us, then all the armies in Rome could not hold them closed.

In the darkest hour of the night our prayers were heard. Suddenly a shining light appeared, and in the light an angel of the Lord, who simply beckoned to us, and behold, the gates of the dungeon opened before us, and we walked out. Quietly through the room of sleeping guards we walked, and every door we came upon opened to our passage and closed quietly behind us. Shortly we were in the street outside the Temple, and the angel disappeared.

We knew what would happen. In the morning the High Priest would send for us, and the guards would find the dungeon empty. And, surely enough, at noon a messenger found us preaching to the multitudes in

the Temple yard, and summoned us to the presence of the High Priest.

I could tell, when I arrived in the court of the Great Council, that there had been grave trouble that morning. Outside the court I saw three guards lashed to the post where the scourge was given. They had been punished for letting us escape—as the High Priest thought. And the High Priest was nervous in my presence. “Thou Galilean,” he said, his voice trembling, “did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.”

Again I repeated the great gospel that we were preaching, hoping to reach the hearts of these fearful and cringing priests: “We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”

The High Priest only wrung his hands when I had finished, and as if they were written in a book I could read the thoughts that were racing through his mind. How can I confound this man and his followers, and kill them?, he was thinking. How can I trap them

into the crime of blasphemy so that they can be sentenced to death? Then would their teaching stop!

As he pondered his evil thoughts, with his lips quivering, one of the Pharisees arose. This man, whose name was Gamaliel, was noted the length and breadth of the land for his wisdom. Speaking out, he said: "Now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

When Gamaliel finished his speech, the men muttered to one another. I could see that they were mostly in accord with what Gamaliel had said, and that only a few of them were still thinking how best they might do away with us. Unfortunately, the High Priest was not convinced of Gamaliel's wisdom, and as they bade us go from the judging, I could tell that although many of those present would keep an open heart and an open mind to the message of Jesus the Christ, the High Priest was determined to see an end to us and our teachings.

It came sooner than expected.

No, it was not one of us who was harmed. Even the High Priest had wits enough to realize that if he harmed any of the leaders of the Nazarenes, the whole company of thousands of our followers might

arm themselves and burn Jerusalem to the ground in retaliation. It was one of our most loyal and gentle companions who fell first to the hatred of the High Priest.

Stephen had joined us soon after the Resurrection. A strong man and a loyal man, he was righteous in the sight of God and a true believer in our faith. So great was our confidence in him that we had made him one of the seven to whom we entrusted the money that we collected to care for the poor.

On the very day following my encounter with the High Priest, Stephen was preaching in one of the many synagogues of Jerusalem when he incurred the wrath of certain Pharisees from Alexandria and Cilicia. Knowing that the High Priest was plotting against us, these Pharisees used their knowledge against Stephen, falsely accusing him of blasphemy.

When the High Priest heard of this, he was overjoyed. He might not dare harm the leaders of the Nazarenes, but he could vent his anger upon the lesser ones among us. He jumped at the chance to hale Stephen to the Temple and to try him for blasphemy. He had the idea that if he could sentence Stephen to death on some charge or other, it would frighten our followers by the hundreds and destroy the power of the Nazarenes.

Even as they had with Jesus, false witnesses testi-

fied against Stephen. They claimed that he had said that Jesus had promised to destroy the Temple. This, of course, was not true. Neither had Jesus promised that, nor had Stephen said that. But it was a blasphemy, if true, and the High Priest meant to make it sound true.

"Are these things so?" he shouted at Stephen, hoping that Stephen would deny the charges, for he had witnesses who would swear that Stephen was lying.

But Stephen did not even reply to so false a charge. He realized that however he replied, the High Priest would find some way to prove him wrong, and so he simply ignored the trial and preached, as we all did, that the Temple and the Law had been replaced by Jesus, and that true worship of God was not through obedience to the dusty collection of laws in the cluttered Temple, but by faith in Jesus as the true redeemer of mankind.

Naturally, this inflamed the anger of the High Priest, and he immediately gave up all thoughts of even a mock trial. Shaking with rage, he pointed his finger at Stephen, but he was so overcome with anger that he could not even speak. And as the High Priest pointed the accusing finger at him, Stephen raised his hands to heaven and shouted: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."

Blasphemy this was to the High Priest and all his cohorts! Preaching that Jesus was standing on the right hand of God! It drove the High Priest beyond the limits of his endurance, and, throwing all caution to the winds, not even going through the motions of seeking permission from the Romans to execute Stephen, he had our beloved follower taken out to the field where criminals were punished. There a crowd of angry Pharisees, urged on by the priests, stoned him to death.

And in such terrible fashion did Stephen go to his death. In that hour the prophecy of Jesus came true: "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake."

For the first time since the crucifixion of Jesus the blood of his followers was spilled in hatred for his gospel. In that hour I knew that hatred would breed hatred, and that the path we would follow from then on would be strewn with blood.

Now the gauntlet was thrown down, and the true test of our faith was only begun. We were no longer just a peaceful sect of Jewry. We were outcasts among our own brothers.

## 14. A ROMAN CENTURION IN OUR RANKS

LATE LAST NIGHT, as we drew our rapid march to a halt, Silas, who had been in Rome, came down from the city to meet us. It was urgent that he find me, and when the beacon lights had carried the message up to Rome that our ship had landed, he took a fast horse and rode all through the day and the night to bring me tragic news. Throughout all the Empire the hatred against our Christian congregations is growing, and many of the churches in Asia are suffering from the lash of persecution. Letters have come from them to our brethren in Rome, hoping to find me to give me the sad news. And so, laying aside the story of my life that John Mark has so faithfully been taking down, I spent the long night with Silas composing a letter to be carried with all speed to our suffering followers in the eastern provinces. This letter will

be carried throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

*The First Epistle General of Peter* I called it, and in it I urged all Christians to give complete loyalty to their rulers, and to lead blameless lives, lest they find themselves subject to even worse persecution. Particularly did I urge them to hold steadfast to their faith in Jesus, and I told them that victory will come at last to those who maintain their faith even through fiery trials. Above all, I warned them not to let the persecutions of the hour lead them to hatred and bitterness, but to forgiveness, patience, and hope at all times, for such was the preaching of Jesus, our Lord.

May God give Silas strength and haste as he carries this letter into Asia.

Quickly, now, to continue my story.

With Stephen dead, the High Priest exulted. But if he had thought that he could frighten the Nazarenes into falling away from their faith by the cruel killing of Stephen, he was like a man who thinks he can put out a fire in dry grass by blowing on the embers.

What happened was this—when the news of Stephen's death was noised about, a large number of our followers took fright that a persecution was about to come upon them, and they took up their roots and left. Many of them had come to Jerusalem



from other cities and towns only to be followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Now, they returned to their own homes, and into each of those hundreds of villages, towns, and cities they carried the gospel of the Risen Christ. Within a matter of weeks there were actually more Nazarenes outside Jerusalem than in the Holy City. Only those few of us who were called the apostles, and our dearest and closest friends, dared remain. Whatever dangers the High Priest might place before the others, he still did not dare bring harm directly to us, for he was afraid of the miraculous powers he knew we had.

At the time all this happened, I was vastly troubled that so many of our people were leaving Jerusalem, for I then thought of our sect as only a branch of Jewry, and I had hopes that it might one day replace the Pharisees and the Sadducees and come to rule in the Temple. What I did not understand was that the planting of these roots of our faith in so many different parts of our world would have the result of making our faith an international religion open to Jew and Gentile alike. I did not realize it at the time, but the death of Stephen helped bring into fulfillment an ancient prophecy of Isaiah: "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."

That had been one of the great missions for which

the Messiah had descended upon us, and now we were watching it come to pass.

In fact, to me was reserved the honor of first opening the door of our faith to Gentiles.

For ages, as you Greeks and Romans know, we Jews have considered ourselves a chosen people, a race apart. I know now that it was one of the reasons why we were so often persecuted, but that was the way our fathers looked upon matters. During all these ages we did not actually try to keep Gentiles from worshiping our God, but we did insist that the only way they could come among us and enjoy our worship was to obey every one of the laws of our people, and to be circumcised as a token of faith.

Now, there were many righteous and worthy Gentiles who simply did not understand our laws, or who could not possibly obey them. Roman soldiers, for example, as much as they might wish to worship God, would be severely punished if they refused to take up arms on the Sabbath, which is one of our religious laws. I use the example of a Roman soldier, for just such a person came to me at this time to be baptized a Christian.

I had journeyed down to the city of Joppa, not far from the seaport of Caesarea, where the Roman governor kept his palace. There lived in Caesarea a Roman centurion, Cornelius, who was a deeply spir-

itual and God-fearing man, but because he was a Roman and a soldier, he was kept away from complete communion with our God, even though he attended a synagogue. Many months had Cornelius troubled about this matter, and often he had prayed to God for guidance.

Now when I was visiting Joppa, God saw fit to bring me to Cornelius. As the centurion told me later, he had dreamed of an angel, and the angel had said: "Cornelius, thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter."

The very next day, while his servants were seeking me, I had a vision that instructed me what I should do when I met Cornelius, although at the time I did not know the meaning of the vision. I was on the roof of the house where I was staying, making my midday prayers, when I beheld a strange sight in my trance. I saw a huge vessel, like a great canvas sheet, coming down to earth. In this vessel were a number of wild animals: birds, snakes, eels, and all manner of animals which we Jews were forbidden to eat by the same laws I have been describing. At the same time, in my vision, I heard a voice telling me: "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat!"

Now these animals were considered unclean by us,

and we lived under a strict rule forbidding the eating of unclean meat. Even in my trance I was conscious of a great mental anguish as the idea was forced upon me that I should eat of them. "Not so, Lord," I cried out in the depths of my vision, "for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean."

Then the voice of the vision spoke out to me a second time: "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common."

Three times that same vision came to me as I lay in my trance, and when I arose, every detail was as clear as a figure engraved upon a rock. The meaning of the words was very clear—despite our laws against unclean and taboo meat, nothing that God had created could be called unclean merely by the priests.

But although I understood the words, I could not understand the meaning of the vision. Clearly the Lord was telling me something important, but the more I pondered it, the more confused I got.

As I sat pondering the strange vision, word was brought to me that certain men from Caesarea wanted to see me. These were the messengers that Cornelius, the centurion, had sent, but I did not know it at that time. Being unwilling to interrupt my pondering, I sent word down to them that I could not visit with them.

When I did that, I heard the strange voice of the vision again. This time it told me: "Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them."

When I heard these words, I did not hesitate. I knew that the Lord was working with me in mysterious ways, and that shortly the whole puzzle of the vision of the unclean meat would be opened to me. Gathering my robe about me, I went to greet the two men.

The next day I returned with them to Caesarea, to meet with Cornelius. So confident had Cornelius been that I would return with his messengers that he was awaiting us at the gates of the city. When he saw us on a turning of the road, he rushed forward and threw himself to the ground at my feet.

With Cornelius were a number of his friends, and, after our greeting, he asked me to preach the new gospel to them. Shortly later, in his house, I made them a sermon that grew out of my new understanding. When Cornelius greeted me, and when I realized how righteous a man he was, I suddenly understood the meaning of my vision. In my trance God had been telling me that the time had come when we should admit Gentiles into our worship on an equal basis with the Jews, and that the old laws

that made us Jews cling together and not mix with Gentiles should be abandoned.

"Of a truth," I said, "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

Following that, I told them the whole account of the ancient prophecies, and that Jesus of Nazareth had been sent to earth to fulfill those prophecies and to redeem mankind. When I finished, Cornelius and all of his friends rushed forward and begged me to baptize them and to accept them into our new Christian faith.

As I spoke the blessing of baptism, I realized that a heroic hour had arrived. In that moment the seeds that the High Priest had sown in the murder of Stephen began to bear fruit. The message of Jesus was no longer the sole possession of a small sect of Jews known as the Nazarenes or the Galileans. With the acceptance of Cornelius and his friends into our congregation, our faith made the first step toward becoming what it is even today—a worship of God through Jesus Christ that embraces men and women of every race and every color.

Truly I was carrying out the commands that Jesus had given us when he said: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He

that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

The road to Caesarea became the road to Rome, and, praise God, it shall go on from Rome to all the world as younger men than I take up the torch and carry it farther.

## 15. THE FLAMES OF ROME

ANOTHER DAY HAS PASSED, and we are now another hard, long day's march nearer to Rome.

Late this afternoon, as we rounded the slope of a great hill and made our way to its summit, a terrible sight greeted our eyes. Far, far to the north a vast column of smoke rose into the sky. For a long while we watched, and then, as the sun set and darkness fell, we could see the red glare of a great fire. Others in our party have tried to tell me that it is only dry grass burning in the countryside or a small village on our way visited by disaster. But I know in my heart that this is not so. There is only one possible cause for so great a fire. The omens that have riddled my dreams these past few weeks are coming true. Rome is burning, that I know!

I would go on through the night and again the next day to reach Rome, but our horsemen will not



travel at night. The way is too dangerous, they tell me. So, against my wishes, we have made camp at the outskirts of a small village. This may be the last night I shall be able to recall my life for John Mark's quick pen, for I mean to go all the way to Rome tomorrow.

So, hurriedly, we will continue with what may be the final chapter of the acts and words of Simon bar-Jona, surnamed Peter.

After I had accepted Cornelius and his gentile friends into our congregation, I returned to Jerusalem. There, my fellow apostles and I wrestled with the problem through many a puzzled hour and long into the nights. The idea that a devout Jew could even associate with a Gentile, let alone admit him to the congregation of the followers of the Jewish Messiah, was scandalous to them. But all I could say was that God had spoken to me in a vision and had told me to admit them. Finally, all agreed that God does work in mysterious ways, and that our eyes had been opened to a new and strange matter. When finally we agreed, we rose from our couches where we had sat arguing, and sang a hymn of praise to the wonders of God. The next day all of us announced to our followers this proclamation: "God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

Now indeed did matters move at a breath-taking

pace. When it became known that this one sect of Jewry would accept gentile converts without asking them to obey the complex laws of Moses, they came to us by the hundreds in every city and town in Asia, and, we soon learned from travelers, in Greece and Italia, and even in Rome. Truly the seed had sprouted a tree with far-flung branches. However, I must record the fact that we who remained in Jerusalem clung rigidly to all the rituals of the Temple. Call us old-fashioned, if you like, but it was no easy task to throw off the habits and the faithfulness that had been ours since birth. Indeed, as it happened, there soon came to be two quite distinct branches to our faith—the early, smaller branch that remained in Jerusalem and that I today call the Jewish branch of the Christian congregation, and the gentile branch that spread throughout the rest of the world.

Where all of this would lead I did not know. Nor did any of the others of us. But one thing did become evident. Our little company of apostles soon came to share the leadership of our faith with many others. No longer were John, and James, and I looked upon as the only pillars and leaders of our faith. In other cities younger men came to the front, men like Paul of Tarsus, Barnabas in Antioch, Apollos in Ephesus, and many others like them. Righteous and devout men were they all, and in their worthy hands we

were content to place the torch that we had lighted—the torch of the belief in Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God.

As a matter of fact, I was very glad to recognize these new leaders in our rapidly spreading church, for every day matters became increasingly troubled for those of us who remained in Jerusalem. Not a season passed that I did not expect the Nazarene congregation in Judea to be destroyed. Thus, at any moment, I thought, the very worship of God through Jesus Christ might have to be moved from Jerusalem to a gentile city for its headquarters, and it was comforting to know that in Tarsus, in Alexandria, in Antioch, and even in Rome there would be those who could carry on in our places if we first apostles should be killed.

My fears of death were by no means in vain, as I am about to relate. Herod Antipas was banished to Gaul for his evil, and was succeeded by his nephew, Herod Agrippa. Not only did Agrippa inherit the rule of Galilee and Peraea, but of Judea as well. From the day of his arrival in Jerusalem he made it quite plain that he would do everything in his power to stem the rising tide of the Christian brotherhood, for he was a staunch Pharisee. But what was more important, as ruler he played a neat game of poli-

tics with the High Priest, who was still our bitter enemy.

So, with Agrippa on the throne of Jewry, the day was done when our rulers would fear us. One of Agrippa's first official acts was to execute my beloved companion, James, the brother of John. And he cast me into prison.

The events of those horrible days moved so rapidly that even now I cannot successfully untangle them in my cluttered mind. All I did know, as I lay on my straw pallet in the prison, was that if the Lord willed it for me to escape, I had best take my wife and leave Jerusalem. I might escape death once, twice, and even three times, but I knew that sooner or later my head would roll after James's. Better a live apostle in gentile hands, I thought, than a dead one in Jerusalem. But I did not worry, you must understand, for I knew that whatever happened, it would be the will of God and not any will of mine. If my time on earth was complete, it was complete. If not, I would live a while longer.

With that thought in mind, I lay down to sleep in the damp darkness of the prison, and hardly had I closed my eyes to court slumber than the Lord made his will evident to me.

Again, as had happened before, a divine being came to me and led me through the barred doors of

the prison in the dead of the night. It was a sign to me that I should leave Jerusalem, never to return.

I went immediately to the house of the very John Mark who is writing this down, and knocked on the door. When I was admitted, I found the company deep in prayer. They were praying for my release from prison.

With tears of joy in our eyes we embraced, and I told them of my resolve to depart from the Holy City, and take my knowledge of the life and works of Jesus Christ to other cities, where the power of the Pharisees could not reach me. I told them of my thoughts, and of how I had come to this decision, and as they wept to see me leave their company, I told them simply: "Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren."

I was not speaking of James the son of Zebedee, who lay dead. I was speaking of a new leader among us—James the Just, the living brother of our Lord, Jesus of Nazareth. Into his hands I passed the burden of the leadership of the Jerusalem congregation of Christians.

But they were strong hands and his heart was brave. He would not falter.

Together, then, my dear wife and I kissed our good companions farewell, and as the cock crowed

to announce the morning, we set off for the gate that led to the north.

"Where will you go, Simon?" asked John, with tears in his eyes.

"I do not know," I replied in all honesty. "You can tell the brethren simply that I departed and went into another place."

Now the first rays of morning are coming up from the east to light our uncomfortable resting ground on the road to Rome. John Mark is so weary that his eyes look like dull ashes, and there is no more oil in our lamp. In a moment it will be light enough for us to travel, and we shall be on our way again. I must bring this account of my life to a close on the bottom of this very scroll.

It was just twenty years ago that my wife and I left Jerusalem and shook the dust of that ancient city from our feet forever. For those twenty years I have been an almost constant traveler. My wife did not well endure the rigors of our eternal journeying, and I buried her some few months ago in Antioch, where I was visiting and preaching to the Christian congregation. I had spent a year there earlier, and many pleasant and busy months in the other cities in the province of Asia, Cilicia, and Pontus. On several occasions I visited our devoted brethren in Rome and

in the great cities of Greece, and on all these journeys she was my constant and devoted companion. Her death was a sore loss.

As I grew older I found that my mission was not to accept the leadership of any of the congregations whom I visited, although many of them honored me by asking me to stay with them. But I knew this would not be wise. Preach to these churches I would, and counsel them, but to judge over them was not my mission. They were Greeks and Romans, Jews and Gentiles mixed. I was a Jewish Galilean. We were truly brothers in Christ, but I soon found that I had a broader and more important mission in life than to live in any one city and carry the burdens of leadership.

No, my mission was this. One by one the apostles reached the end of their lives, and were called to Grace by Almighty God. James had been killed in Jerusalem. My brother Andrew was crucified in Patrae, in the province of Achaia. Philip was blessed not to be crucified for his labors, but died in God's own good time in Hierapolis. One by one they disappeared from our work until, these last few years, I have been the only one except John still living of those twelve who walked with Christ and who talked with Christ.

Thus, my greatest duty has been to go from place

to place, from city to city, and from church to church, and tell ever and again of the events of those days when the Son of God walked the earth. I alone can tell what he said and what he did, for all the rest who knew him are gathered to his bosom. I was the first to be called, and I shall be the last to leave. And now I am going to Rome to tell them again the beautiful story as I remember it.

This time, if I never return, it is written down for the ages, thanks to John Mark's tireless pen.

I was about to recite the prayer and the blessing that I give to all whom I meet, but a messenger has just arrived. Spattered with mud and weary of the trip, he has ridden all the night long.

It is bitter news that he brings me. The flames that I saw from afar were, as I had feared, Rome burning!

For three days that ancient and beautiful city has been flaming and burning, a very volcano.

The Emperor Nero has decided in the depths of his lunacy that our Christian congregation put the torch to Rome. In every ward of the city, the messenger tells me, the Roman soldiers are hunting down our followers and putting them to the sword.

Even my strong brother in Christ, Paul of Tarsus, is dead. The messenger has showed me a last letter that he wrote while the guards were drawing lots to



see which would win his scanty belongings. It is a second letter to Timothy, our faithful worker in Ephesus. In the first portion of the letter, which he wrote the day before the fire started, Paul urges Timothy to join him in Rome, and perhaps help release him from prison. And then, at the end, while the guards are scrapping, he realizes it would be too late. It is a bare scratch and hardly can it be read. "The time of my departure is at hand," he has written. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

Now these are my last instructions. To John Mark, that he carry this account of my life back to Ephesus, where it may be kept out of harm's way. That he carry Paul's last letter to Timothy. That he tell the churches in Asia that I, Simon called Peter, went up to Rome to comfort our brethren and to die with them in the persecution of Nero. The church of Rome will be my grave, for truly did Jesus once tell me, "he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ALBERT N. WILLIAMS is a university official and well-known author. Once connected with the National Broadcasting Company as a writer and producer of educational radio programs, he is now the Director of University Development at the University of Denver (Colorado Seminary). He has written widely in two general fields—the history of his home state of Colorado and popular religious history. His western books include *Rocky Mountain Country*, *The Water and the Power*, and *The Black Hills*. In the field of popular religious history he is known for *The Book by My Side*, a popular history of the Bible, and *The Holy City*, a history of Jerusalem. He has published articles and short stories in *Reader's Digest*, *Collier's*, *Liberty*, and *Cosmopolitan*.







